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ROMAN LITERATURE

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ROMAN LITERATURE

BY

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PRIMER OF ROMAN LITERATURE

PART I

THE GROWTH OF ROMAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. The Romans were not a people naturally given to literature. There are some nations who seem to be gifted by nature with a lively imagination and with a love for beautiful forms and thoughts which must express itself in art. This was so, above all, with the Greeks. At the very earliest time at which we can learn anything of their national life, music, song, and poetry were the delight, not of a cultivated few, but of the great body of the people. The first attempts at these arts were of course rude and imperfect; but the keen sense of the Greek mind for all that was out of place or unfitting aided them to remove defects and to supply what was lacking, until, quite without help from other nations, except perhaps at the very beginning, they reached that beautiful perfection of expression, both in language and in art, which has made their works the models for after-ages. But it was not so with the Romans. It is a strange but a true saying of a famous historian that the Romans were at

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their greatest and best when they had no literature. There were from a very early time rude chants in honour of the gods; but these were old formulæ, handed down by tradition, and there was no desire to replace them by new and more artistic hymns. The Italians have always been fond of satire; and we know that there were times at which great license of scurrilous jesting was allowed by custom. But this habit, which in Greece gave rise to the Attic comedy, one of the most brilliant products of human genius, at Rome was checked by the action of the state authorities, and never developed any popular literature. At other times, especially at funerals, it was the custom to sing the famous deeds of great citizens; and it may be that some of the songs then sung supplied the family legends which play a great part in early Roman history. But these too never took any artistic shape; and though none of them have come down to us, we have no reason to think that they at all approached the simple poetic power of the national ballads of such countries as England, Germany, or Spain. At a very early date there was a kind of bald chronicle of events attached to the lists of magistrates kept by the pontiffs; but these annals were scrappy and imperfect, and so far from being an attempt at literary history, hardly even furnished the materials for such an attempt. But whatever there may have been in the way of the germs of poetry or history, lost all importance for the national life from the way in which it was regarded by the leading citizens. There was no place in education for a study of literature. The boy never left his father's side; and learnt his work as a farmer and his duty as a citizen by accompanying him to the field, to the assembly, and to the Senate. The old-fashioned

training aimed rather at forming a grave, self-reliant and trustworthy character (*gravitas*), and teaching practical wisdom, than at any high intellectual culture. If a boy learnt arithmetic enough to keep his accounts correctly, little more was desired in this respect. The only accomplishment which was valued was that of speaking with clearness and force; and this was far more a matter of natural powers, strengthened by observation and practice, than of any special training. So when, after the expulsion of Pyrrhus, Rome was brought into closer relations with the Greek cities of Southern Italy and Sicily, and came to know more of the beautiful literature of Greece, it had none of its own with which to meet and to compare it. In science, in art, in philosophy, in mythology, above all, in literature, the Romans had to go to Greece for the lessons that were nowhere else to be learnt.

2. **Greek Influence.**—This is the first great fact to be remembered in reading the history of Roman literature. From the beginning to the end it never shakes off the effects of this influence of Greece. It would not be fair to speak of it as merely a copy or a reproduction of Greek literature. Roman thought was in some ways independent of the thought of Greece, and indeed out of harmony with it. But the literary forms in which this thought was expressed were, with hardly an exception, those which had been borrowed from Greece. There is not a Latin work which has come down to us, either in poetry or in prose, which would not have been quite different if it had not been for the writers of Greece. Hence the literature of Rome demands our study for two somewhat different reasons. Its immediate claim is that it records the thought of a people whose empire forms the central point of history. If we are to

distinguish between ancient and modern history, we can only say that the former is that which leads up to and ends in Rome; while the latter is that which starts with Rome. The Roman Empire and the Roman Church formed together the backbone of civilisation for centuries. The Latin language was the language of culture for more than a thousand years. No influence, except that of the Bible, can be compared in range and power with that which was exerted upon the thoughts of men for all these centuries by the great masters of Latin literature. It is quite impossible for us to conceive what the culture of Europe would have been if Cicero and Vergil, Livy and Tacitus had not been familiar to its leaders from their very boyhood.

But apart from this direct historical importance, the Latin literature is hardly less deserving of our study as the channel through which for many centuries the thought of Greece found its way to the Western world. Direct communication between the East and the West was rare and scanty during the time when the great modern nations were forming. The only access which these had to the fountain-heads of poetry and philosophy was through the Latin writers. If it had not been for the echoes which the latter sent on, the voices which first aroused the sense of the true and the beautiful would have been silenced for ages. It is true that when Greek literature came to be known directly to the Western world its influence was far more powerful than it had been when only known through Latin. But this must not make us forget how much the Latin literature had done for men like Dante and Chaucer, and we may even add Shakspere, to whom Greek was still unknown.

3. **The Latin Language.**—We know extremely

little of the Latin language before its literature begins. A few inscriptions remain, but they are very brief and obscure. Still they help us somewhat, when taken along with the earliest literary fragments, to understand what was then the general character of the Latin language. The inhabitants of Italy in the third century before Christ consisted mainly of three stocks, which had settled in the peninsula before historic times, and two groups of more recent immigrants. In the south-east there were Messapians or Iapygians, a barbarous race, of whose language and origin nothing is known with certainty. Along the northern part of the western coast there was the wealthy confederation of the Etruscans, who two or three centuries before had been more widely extended and powerful, but who still retained their language and customs. They too were a mysterious race, whose language has never yet been shown to be connected with that of any other nation, and of whose early history we know almost nothing. In the northern part of Italy there were many settlements of invading Keltic tribes, and in the south many Greek colonies. The latter were no longer so flourishing as they had once been, having suffered much in wars with each other and with the barbarous natives; but Greek culture and the use of the Greek language were widely spread. The whole of the central hill-country, and the plains of Latium and Campania with part of the eastern coast-land were occupied by tribes of the Italian race. These were divided again into two main branches—(1) the *Latin* branch, and (2) that known as *Umbro-Sabellian*, to which belonged the Umbrians, Volscians, Marsians, and Samnites. The Italians belonged to the great Indo-European stock, and so their language had

many points on which it agreed with the Greek on the one hand, and with Keltic on the other—perhaps more closely with the latter. But these resemblances, though scholars can now discover them, were, of course, not such that an Italian could be understood by a Greek or a Kelt, any more than a German could now be understood by a Frenchman. Nor indeed could the various tribes of the Italians understand each other. We have a good many specimens of two of the languages of the Umbro-Sabellian group still preserved; but the Umbrian of Umbria and the Oscan of the Samnites settled in Campania, though alike in some points where both differ from Latin, do not appear to have resembled each other more closely than French and Spanish. They were both very different from Latin, and it has only been at the cost of much time and skill that scholars quite familiar with Latin have been able to interpret the remains of Umbrian and Oscan; and even still there is much that is obscure and uncertain. It must be remembered then that when we first get to know anything of the Latin language, it was only spoken in a small part, not so much perhaps as one-sixth of the Italian peninsula. But as the Romans conquered one part of Italy after another, their language naturally spread; till by the time of the birth of Christ it was used throughout the whole of the country. The old dialects continued to live for a time, but probably they were never much used for literature, and if anything was written in these languages, it has not come down to us; so they will concern us no further.

When a language is not used much, if at all, for literary purposes, it is naturally liable to change and decay. Men are content if they can be easily understood, and they wish to secure this with the least

expenditure of effort. Hence we usually find a tendency to lighten words by shortening vowels, dropping one or two or more consonants, or omitting final letters. This was often the case in the popular Latin at the time when literature began at Rome. The earliest writers used the language as they found it, but it was soon necessary to endeavour to give greater regularity and exactness to the pronunciation and the syntax. We shall see that it was only by degrees that this was achieved; and it cannot be said to have been attained completely until the time of the greatest writers, *i.e.* during the half century or so before the birth of Christ. But more than this was needful. Latin was a strong, clear, and exact language, very well suited for purposes of business and of government. But so long as the Romans cared little for the graces of oratory or the delicate suggestiveness of poetry, their language remained unfit to convey these. It required at least two centuries before it could be made into the flexible and expressive organ of literature. It will be necessary in studying the Latin literature to notice the stages through which the language passed before it was capable of becoming the medium of civilisation throughout the Western world. To the last it remained in many respects inferior to Greek. The great variety of particles in Greek, which convey so many delicate shades of meaning and indicate so suggestively the connexion between different clauses, are almost entirely wanting in Latin. So is that free power of creating compounds, which gives so much richness to poetry and especially to lyric verse. Even to the last Latin did not lend itself naturally to philosophical distinctions and abstract thought. But while the Roman writers themselves could not but feel its

inferiority to Greek in grace and versatility, they justly claimed for it clearness, dignity, and power. It was moulded by degrees into sonorous cadences and effective periods. Its structure was precise and logical. It can say with vigour and force exactly what the writer means. Hence there is no better intellectual exercise than the practice of writing Latin prose.

4. **The Stages of Roman Literature.**—Latin has been used for literature for more than 2000 years. There are still many books written and published in Latin, though not so many as a century ago ; and if we were to include in the literature of a language all that has been written in that language, it would be quite hopeless to attempt to give even an outline of it within a brief compass. But modern Latin writings rarely come under the head of literature proper ; they are almost always scientific or theological works, written in Latin only that they may be more generally intelligible to scholars, than if they were composed in some modern language. But by Roman literature we mean the recorded thought of the Roman people. Even to this it is not easy to fix any precise limits. There are no sudden breaks in history. As the Roman Empire spread, Latin became the national language of all Western Europe and Northern Africa, and we might fairly include all the literature here produced before the rise of the new nationalities. Still it is better to draw the line much earlier. With the growth of Christianity a new literature arose, differing almost as much in form as in spirit from that which had gone before. It is of great value and interest in itself, but the study of it may well be kept distinct from that of Pagan Rome. Even the later heathen writers are better excluded. In their time many of

the best qualities of literature were dying out. There was very little freshness, accuracy, or sense of form and rhythm. We learn from them little or nothing of that which gives "classical" writers a claim to their name, that which "puts them in the class of the very best." They are not among those whose work has deeply influenced later generations. We may therefore wisely stop about the middle of the second century after Christ; then we shall be able to study Roman literature in its growth and at its best, and learn enough of its decline to see something of its nature and its causes. We may then make these main divisions:

I. The Growth of Roman Literature.
II. The Prime of Roman Literature.
III. The Decline of Roman Literature.

I. The first period extends from about 250 B.C. to about 80 B.C. During this time the Romans were learning, first in verse and then in prose, to imitate the great Greek writers, and were attempting at least one if not two important branches of literature—satire, and didactic verse—on lines more of their own devising. Here we have tragedy, comedy, and epic verse all written with more or less success, and the beginnings of history.

II. During the period of the prime, from about 80 B.C. to the death of Augustus in 14 A.D., we find prose reaching its highest excellence in Cicero and Caesar in its earlier half, and Livy in its later; while the generation of the former is marked by the didactic verse of Lucretius and the lyrics of Catullus; and that of the latter by Vergil's epic and didactic verse, the lyrics, satires, and epistles of Horace, and the elegies of their younger contemporaries, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid. Within this period falls by far the greater part

of the Latin literature usually studied in our schools and colleges.

III. The period of decline must be divided into at least two stages, with widely different styles. The reign of Nero (54-68 A.D.) is the most flourishing period of what is called the Spanish School. This is marked by much brilliancy, but by overstrained and often contorted emphasis. Rhetoric, both in prose and verse, assumes undue prominence. In the philosopher Seneca, in his nephew Lucan, and in the young satirist Persius alike this feature is conspicuous. The reigns of the Flavian emperors (69-96 A.D.) show a reaction against this in comparatively dull but sober and learned writers like the elder Pliny and Quintilian, and laboriously correct verse-writers like Valerius and Silius. Under the last of these emperors, Domitian, it was only the brilliant but profligate wit of Martial and the epigrammatic finish of Statius which could find utterance in the gloomy tyranny, which stifled all higher literature. The reigns of the good emperors Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian (96-138 A.D.) made a free and outspoken literature once more possible; and Juvenal, Tacitus, and the younger Pliny adorn with their genius the last period of classical Latin. If to these we add the varied learning of Suetonius, the archaistic affectations of Fronto, and the gossiping medley of Aulus Gellius, we have completed the list of the Roman writers who call for attention in this brief sketch.

CHAPTER II

A.—THE EARLIEST POETS

1. **Livius Andronicus.**—By the middle of the third century B.C. some knowledge of Greek science and Greek literature was coming to be fairly common at Rome. The nobles had for some time been acquainted, at least in a few instances, with the Greek language. Some could speak it, though not very correctly or elegantly, as L. Postumius showed at Tarentum. Others could even perhaps already write in it, as, at a later date (210 B.C.), Fabius Pictor the first historian of Rome. Many had sufficient knowledge of it to use it for business purposes. But by the end of the First Punic War the increasing number of slaves and freedmen at Rome, many from the Greek towns in Southern Italy and Sicily, had extended some knowledge of the language pretty widely, even among the lower classes at Rome. Not long after this date, when the state of things could not have altered greatly, we find in the plays of Plautus, which were intended for a thoroughly popular audience, abundance of jokes which could not have been understood without some knowledge of Greek. From about this time the study of Greek came to be a part of the usual education. The teaching of the *litterator* or writing-master was followed by that of the *grammaticus* or professor of literature; and the only literature which he could teach was that of Greece.

The study of Greek literature acted in two different ways on Roman education. In the first place, the

teacher desired to use the same method of study in dealing with the Latin language as that with which he was familiar in his teaching of Greek. But there were no great works of Latin authors which he could take as the basis of his instruction, as he had been accustomed to take Homer and the tragedians. Hence it was necessary that he should produce a text-book by translation. It is very characteristic of the Romans that their first attempts at literature had so purely practical an aim in view. It is not less significant that the earliest writers in Latin were not natives of the city of Rome. The first known to us was a Greek freedman taken prisoner at the capture of Tarentum (272 B.C.) and afterwards emancipated, who, therefore, prefixed his master's name to his own, and was called *Livius Andronīcus*. He set up at Rome as a teacher of Greek and Latin; and in order to supply his pupils with a text for his lectures on the Latin language he translated the *Odyssey* into Latin verse. The metre adopted was the only one then in use in Latin, the rude old *Saturnian* measure. Macaulay has quoted, as an instance of this, our nursery line, "The queen was in her parlour, eating bread and honey"; but many departures from this normal type are allowed, in some of which almost all metrical form seems to be lost. The translation seems to have been entirely without any literary merit; it had not even that of faithfulness, for some passages of the original were curiously misunderstood; and it was so devoid of grace that Cicero compares it to the first rude attempts at sculpture, which passed under the name of Daedalus, wherein the legs and feet were not separated, and the eyes were only indicated by a stroke. But it continued in use as a school-book even in the time of Horace, and

the discussion of its archaic words and constructions gave employment to grammarians down to a much later date.

2. But the influence of Greek literature was not seen in translations only. The Roman citizens who had served in the armies which fought in Sicily during the First Punic War had become acquainted there with the Greek drama, and were ready to welcome a reproduction of it in their own language. In the first year of the peace (240 B.C.) the aediles, whose duty it was to provide for the Roman games, resolved to add to their other attractions that of dramatic representations. Livius was accordingly engaged to produce, with the help of a *troupe* of actors whom he engaged and directed, a tragedy and a comedy in Latin. These performances found such favour that they became a regular part of the games, and *ludi scaenici* were usually given along with the older *ludi circenses*.

The materials for the plays of Livius were drawn from the more familiar legends of Greece, especially those connected with the fall of Troy. His style, so far as we can gather from the scanty fragments that have come down to us, was more free and vigorous in his dramas than in his *Odyssey;* and the metres, an adaptation of those of his originals with numerous licenses, were much less rugged than the Saturnian. Still we find no traces of anything like poetical genius. His work was altogether that of a pioneer; and he succeeded in winning for his craft some credit and recognition in a state where it had been previously ignored. The temple of Minerva in the plebeian quarter of the Aventine was assigned to the "guild of poets" (*collegium poetarum*) which gradually gathered around him, as a place for their

meetings; and we cannot doubt that good work was done here in bringing the intractable language into something like flexibility, and in laying down the laws of poetic expression. When Livius died, about the end of the Second Punic War, the movement which he had started was already in steady progress.

3. **Cn. Naevius.**—The example which Livius had set was very soon followed by a writer of much greater original genius, and of Latin, though not of Roman origin. This was Gnaeus Naevius, a native of a Latin town in Campania, who had served in the Roman armies during the First Punic War. He came forward as a tragic poet as early as 235 B.C., and for a whole generation was active at Rome. Like Livius, he based his plays for the most part on Greek originals: but he made an important departure in tragedy, for he introduced the *fabula praetextata*, in which the characters wore the garb of Roman magistrates, and where the action was drawn either from the legendary history of Rome or even from contemporary triumphs. But he seems to have devoted himself especially to comedy; for we have the names—and unfortunately very little more—of thirty-four of these, while only seven tragedies are known by name to us. Something like a third of these bear Greek titles, and show thereby that Greek customs and life must have been familiar to the audience. The others were largely derived from Greek sources; and Naevius is said to have been the first to adopt the practice of interweaving (*contaminari*) two plays so that the main plot of the one was incorporated as a by-plot in the action of the other. And although he probably drew the plot of his comedies from the Greek, he did not hesitate to introduce many a reference to the persons and events of his own time. The boldness and the

wit with which he did this seemed at one time to promise that the stage of Rome might furnish the opportunity for criticism on public men and affairs as outspoken and effective as that of the Old Comedy at Athens. But this would have been quite against all the notions of the Roman governing body. The sallies of Naevius brought upon him imprisonment, from which he escaped only by apologies and recantations; and when, untaught by this experience, he ventured at a later time to scoff at one of the great Roman houses, he was punished by an exile, the date and nature of which we learn only from a confused and inaccurate tradition, though the fact cannot be questioned.

4. But Naevius did not confine his work to the stage. As he had treated episodes in the national history dramatically, so he was the first to attempt a poetic narrative of a continuous portion of the same; and described the Punic War, in which he had himself taken part, in a chronicle in verse. The metre was the same Saturnian rhythm which Livius had employed for his translation of the *Odyssey*. We have not sufficient fragments left to judge well how he treated his theme; but the fact that he selected twenty-one years of warfare for his subject shows how little his work could have had of the true unity of art. The most important fragment too shows vigorous power of narrative but no artistic skill. It was more significant for what it promised than for what it was in itself. We cannot even estimate its style with any certainty; but, so far as we can see, it was marked by a rough vigour and bold terseness, without any attempt at grace or finish. One line of his has become a common quotation, and expresses with happy brevity a high distinction—"laudari a laudato viro."

5. **Q. Ennius.**—But the writer who in later ages was universally regarded as the "father of Roman poetry" was Q. Ennius. The year of his birth (239 B.C.) almost exactly coincides with that of the first performance of a regular play at Rome. His native place was Rudiae in Calabria, a town belonging to the Messapians, who were now subject allies of the Romans. The district in which it lay formed part of "Great Greece," as it was called from the number and importance of the Greek colonies which had been founded there. Hence Ennius grew up a master equally of the three languages, Latin, Greek, and Oscan—this last, as we have seen, an Italian dialect widely differing from Latin, and certainly unintelligible to the Romans. No doubt this early familiarity with both Greek and Latin helped him much in the attainment of that wide and varied learning in which he seems to have been unequalled among his contemporaries. Of the first half of his life we know only that he served in the army during the Second Punic War, and that near the close of it in Sardinia he became known to Cato, who induced him to settle in Rome. Here he had a modest dwelling near the poets' meeting-place on the Aventine, and supported himself by giving lessons in Greek and Latin. He had many patrons and friends among the nobles, especially those who were interested in the literature of Greece; and here for more than thirty years he devoted himself with unflagging energy to his task of bringing to the knowledge of the Roman people as much as possible of the culture of Greece. Critics are by no means at one in the way in which they regard his work. To some it appears that he destroyed the possibility of a spontaneous growth of national literature, and succeeded in diverting the course of

Roman poetry from its natural channels into artificial conduits, where all its freshness and life were lost. Others—and I think more justly—hold that it was of essential service that the Romans should learn at this stage of their development what had been already achieved; that it was neither desirable nor possible that they should ignore the great Greek masters of thought and utterance; that their language could never have attained flexibility or precision if it had not been for the skill with which Ennius brought out its resources and checked the decay which was already affecting it. It is certain that Ennius, while adhering more closely than any one before him to the form of Greek poetry, was able to pour into it no small infusion of genuine Roman spirit. He was far enough from being a mere copyist. He was a man of real genius; he felt strongly; he spoke nobly; and if the form of his utterance was borrowed from the best models known to him, it is hard for us to imagine in what other way he could have expressed himself so worthily, or done such service to the literary development of the nation of which he was proud to be an adopted citizen. The nature of his work made it impossible for him to confine himself to any one kind of poetry. For comedy he seems to have been little adapted by nature. His character was grave, earnest, and elevated; and although, like Milton, he was not without a power of caustic irony, this found a more appropriate vent in satire. Hence his comedies were few in number, and by no means successful. In tragedy, on the other hand, he found a proper field for his powers. We know the names of twenty-five tragic plays which he wrote, nearly half of them on subjects taken from legends of Troy, and more than 400 lines are preserved, which may be

taken as fair specimens of his style. They show real pathos, lofty and nervous eloquence, and a strong sense of duty and honour, which we may fairly regard as Roman rather than Greek.

6. But the great work of Ennius was his *Annals*. In this he made the first attempt to produce a national epic poem on the model of Homer. Here again, not less than in the Punic War of Naevius, the nature of his subject excluded the unity required of a well-constructed epic; and later critics censured severely the want of art shown in the selection. But the growth and the glory of Rome furnished the leading idea of the poem; and so gave it a certain continuity of interest. He must have devoted some twenty years to its composition; and the eighteen books to which it extended contained at least half as many lines again as the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost*. From these some 600 lines are preserved to us; and so we can form some opinion as to the merit of the whole, at least as far as the metre and language are concerned. In the verse, Ennius had to grapple with a task far more difficult than any which had been previously attempted in Latin. The metres which had been used hitherto admitted many licenses. But now he undertook to write in Homeric hexameters, where the rules are much more precise, and where the laws of quantity have to be rigidly observed. It is hardly possible to overrate the effect which this poem had in fixing the laws of the pronunciation of Latin for literary purposes. Of course he was far from attaining the varied and musical flexibility of his Greek models. There is a stiffness and a roughness which shocked the taste of many who had learnt what the Latin hexameter was capable of becoming in the hands of Vergil, and of those whom he had taught

to write. But there is much vigour and stateliness; and when we compare the verse of Ennius with even the best of contemporary efforts we are much more inclined to wonder that he achieved so much than that something was left to be done.

7. One other branch of the work of Ennius should be noticed; for it helps to show us the purpose which he had mainly in view, and is of interest also as furnishing the earliest specimens of a kind of literature in which later writers were to produce some of their most original work. The word *satura* seems at first to have denoted a kind of "medley" or "hodge-podge," and it was applied at first to a rude dramatic entertainment, with no regular plot, accompanied by music and dancing. But Ennius used it to denote a collection of poems in different metres, and on all kinds of subjects, which were written to make his countrymen familiar with the results of his wide reading, or to deal with topics of personal or general interest. Sometimes the dramatic form was retained by the use of dialogue; sometimes the tone was that of satire, and from this came the later use of the word. But generally we may describe the *saturae* of Ennius as "miscellanies," which might have been written in prose had the use of prose been common.

8. **T. Maccius Plautus.**—And now we pass on to the first Latin author whose works have come down to us in something like their original form and extent. Very shortly after the performance of the first Latin comedy by Livius Andronicus there came to Rome from the recently conquered district of Umbria a boy born in a country town called Sarsina, and named Maccius, with the surname *Plautus* (flat-foot). He found employment among the workmen engaged by those who gave theatrical representations; and

although this must have been of a temporary and occasional character, we are told that he saved some money, with which he engaged in foreign trade. But his speculations were unfortunate, and on his return to Rome he had to take service with a miller, where he was set to the task of turning a handmill, a duty generally reserved for the lowest slaves. But even under these conditions he contrived to turn his knowledge of the stage to account by composing three comedies, which he succeeded in selling to a theatrical manager. They were acted with approval, and the price of them set him free from his laborious duties to devote himself henceforward exclusively to the production of comedies. For something like forty years until his death in 184 B.C., he continued to produce, and not less than twenty of his plays have come down to us; in fact all of those which were recognised as genuine in the time of Cicero, out of the much larger number which were then current under his name. We are able, therefore, to form a good conception of the *fabula palliata*, of which through the whole time of the Roman Republic and Early Empire he was by far the most popular writer.

9. The plays of Plautus—as is implied in the very name, for *pallium* is the Greek mantle, as opposed to the Roman *toga*—were derived entirely from Greek sources. Professor Jebb has shown in his *Primer* (p. 100) how the Old or great political Comedy of Athens—one of the most wonderful products of human genius—was succeeded about a century before the time of Plautus by the New Comedy, which was more like our modern comedy of manners, or humours. The change was due to the decay of political life and freedom at Athens. Writers

no longer ventured to deal with the leading political questions and characters of the day. They chose such stock characters out of the social life of the time as would prove effective on the stage, and endeavoured to maintain the interest of their plays by ingenious plots of intrigue. It is a great mistake to suppose, as many have done, that these plays furnish a faithful picture of Athenian life. They are doubtless true to life so far as they go, and the characters brought on the stage are depicted with great dramatic skill. But there are many, and not the least important sides of social life which do not lend themselves to stage effect. All soldiers were not braggart and cowardly, nor all wealthy wives overbearing and extravagant; and even in Greece there must have been many a happy home, where the sons were not always trying, with the aid of knavish slaves, to swindle and trick their fathers, and the husbands deceiving and robbing their wives. All that we can fairly argue is that the stock characters were sufficiently lifelike to amuse, and the adventures through which they passed not too unfamiliar to be readily enjoyed. Of course the same holds good still more of the Latin copies of the Athenian originals. If we have not in Menander and Philemon a faithful picture of life at Athens, still less can we suppose that the sketch, when transferred to the Latin stage, is a picture of life at Rome. On the contrary it was the very remoteness of the incidents and characters from the national life which protected this form of comedy from the censorship of the authorities. The grave Roman magistrates had no objection to have their fellow-citizens amused on holidays, or even to be amused themselves, by the love-intrigues of young Athenians or the rascalities of Greek para-

sites and panders. But it would have been quite another thing if the morals of Romans had been represented as so corrupt, or their dignity exposed to such humiliations. Hence Plautus and his successors kept invariably to the towns of Greece as the scenes of their comedies; and the characters were always Greek. This does not, however, prevent Plautus from enlivening his dialogue with many a reference to Roman customs, laws, and places. He is as careless of historical or geographical accuracy as ever Shakspere was. Our materials hardly allow us to determine how widely he departed from his originals, but so far as we can learn he treated them with very great freedom. The outline of the plot and the general type of the characters were undoubtedly borrowed; but he probably did not derive much more than hints for the details of the dialogue. There is a rough vigour about it, a real comic force, an untranslatable abundance of puns, all which have very little of the appearance of a translation. Hence we may on the whole regard his plays as belonging to that large division in Roman literature where the form is borrowed from the Greek, but the spirit and the life are essentially Roman. It would be a mistake to regard Plautus as a literary artist; his purpose was to amuse, and to turn an honest penny for himself while he did so; hence some of the plays which show the greatest comic power are spoiled by careless construction and a hasty huddling up of the plot, when the requisite length has been reached. Nor again is he one of the great humorists who have felt the problems of life and human nature all the more deeply because they present them in the form of comedy. He is not a Molière, a Cervantes, or a Thackeray; but ranks rather with Le Sage and

Smollett. He gives us in a permanent literary form that turn for lively badinage, for ludicrous incident, and for ready wit, which has never failed the Italian people. And what is especially his own, is the really remarkable command over the resources of the Latin language at a time when it was in all its early freshness. His metre is often rough, especially to those who have been trained in the more accurate prosody of the later poets; but there is usually a vigour and swing in it, not at all ill adapted to his diction; and at times he varies it with remarkably good effect.

The plays which have come down to us all seem to belong to the last twenty years or so of his life. The earliest historical incident to which there is any reference is the imprisonment of Naevius, dated in 207 B.C., and there is no reason to suppose that any play was earlier than this. The best of his comedies may be said to be the *Aulularia*, the *Captivi*, the *Menaechmi*, the *Pseudolus*, and the *Rudens*; but there are five others hardly inferior to these, the *Trinummus*, the *Mostellaria*, the *Miles Gloriosus*, the *Bacchides*, and the *Amphitruo*. The rest are either more deficient in comic or dramatic power, or deal with scenes and characters which are more offensive to our taste or our moral sense.

B.—THE BEGINNINGS OF LATIN PROSE

1. It has been commonly observed that a literary prose is much later in its development than verse. This does not mean that there is no prose of any kind written, although this is true in some cases. The necessary business of life is of course carried on in prose. Speeches are made in it; laws are drawn up, and rude

chronicles kept without any attempt at verse. But it seems as though, when men first began to try to give artistic shape to the expression of their thoughts, the rigid limits of metre were needed to produce anything like form and order. In Greece epic, elegiac, lyric, and dramatic poetry had all reached the highest point, not only of inspiration, but also of finished elegance, before there had been any serious attempt at harmonious and artistic prose. And so it was, in spite of the Greek models which they had at their command, with the writers of Rome. The first written prose of any literary importance appears, so far as we can now learn, to have been the speech made by the famous blind old censor Appius Claudius in 280 B.C. to urge the Senate to oppose the proposals of Pyrrhus for peace. This, Cicero tells us, was published after its delivery, so that he had read it himself 200 years afterwards. But this speech stands pretty well isolated. When, two generations later, the first attempt was made to produce a history of Rome by a member of the great Fabian house, he wrote in Greek, partly perhaps because he had no wish to appeal to a popular audience, but mainly because the Latin language was not yet moulded into a fit organ for artistic composition. There were plenty of models for the historian in Greek, but nothing of the kind in Latin, and Fabius had not the creative genius needed for the construction of a new form of literature. The same was the case with his younger contemporary L. Cincius Alimentus, a Roman general taken prisoner by Hannibal, who wrote, also in Greek, some account of the wars in which he had taken part.

2. Prose composition in Latin really began with the famous **Cato** the Censor. He seems to have stood, as far as it was possible, outside the stream of

Greek influence, and it was only in extreme old age that he learnt the Greek language. It was no love of literature for its own sake which impelled him to his restless activity. He had no poetic imagination, and never attempted verse. It was simply practical utility at which he aimed; and it was his warm patriotism, the vigour of his character, his biting wit, and strong good sense which gave so much value to his writings. He had raised himself from a humble position to the rank of a leader in the state, partly by his valour as a soldier, but much more by his natural force as a speaker; and the speeches, which had done so much for him, he afterwards published. The practice of treating speeches as literature was one not without its dangers to oratory, as came to be seen at a later time; but at first it was of great service to the development of a prose style, by furnishing specimens which could be studied, imitated, and criticised. Not less than 150 of Cato's speeches were extant in the time of Cicero, who praises highly their acuteness, wit, and conciseness. But we can see from the quotations that have been preserved that Cato had nothing either of the easy flow which marked the simple style of the Greek orators, or of the full-sounding periods of their more elevated rhetoric.

3. Of the various works which he wrote with a directly practical purpose we have only his treatise on Agriculture left to us. This has been somewhat modernised in language by later copyists, but it is still a good example of brief, abrupt, business-like style; and the value of the information which can be gathered from it as to the sentiments as well as the rural economy of the early Romans is great. Unfortunately there is extremely little left of the great work in which Cato laid the foundations of Roman

history. This was the *Origines*, a work which he did not commence until he was already advanced in life. A noteworthy feature in this was that he recorded all that he had been able to learn by diligent inquiry, with but little help from books, as to the early history, not only of Rome, but also of the surrounding Italian tribes. These inquiries filled the first three books, which give the name to the whole. In the following books, four in number, he carried the history down to his own time. Although it was impossible that his work should be critical history, as we should understand the term, and as it was understood long before him by Thucydides, Cato seems to have risen above the trivialities of the annals and the family chronicles, and to have had a true conception of the greatness of Rome and the development of the Roman state. His influence was great over subsequent historians, and at the time of his death the lines along which Roman literature was to run had been clearly laid down. Henceforward we shall see development in many ways; but with the exception of a short-lived and exotic growth of lyric poetry, and a more extensive, if not more important production of elegiac verse, there will be nothing of which the germs are not to be found in Ennius, Plautus, and Cato.

CHAPTER III

DRAMATIC POETRY AND SATIRE

1. THE task of introducing Attic comedy at Rome had been only very imperfectly fulfilled by Plautus. His excellences and his defects alike had unfitted

him to reproduce the plays of Menander, Diphilus, and Philemon, with all their easy grace and artistic finish. He was much too closely in touch with the popular audiences, whose amusement was his only object, and much too rough and hasty in his workmanship, to satisfy the circles of the educated Romans who were now setting the standard for literature. The contemporary work of Ennius and the growth of Greek culture had by this time begun to cleave that chasm between the popular tastes and sympathies, and those of the governing classes, which for good and evil was henceforth to be the distinctive and regulating force in Roman literature. It was natural that attempts should be made to follow more closely the Greek lines in comedy. Of the immediate successors of Plautus the most famous was **Caecilius Statius.** He was by birth an Insubrian Gaul, brought to Rome in 222 B.C. in the train of Marcellus, who had defeated the Insubrians in a famous battle, in which he had slain their chief with his own hand. Like Livius before him and Terence afterwards, he owed his education and his freedom to the favour which he found with his master. His first attempt at comedy failed, and was not even heard to the end; but the chief theatrical manager of the time, Ambivius Turpio, was pleased with it, and insisted on producing it again, this time with conspicuous success. Caecilius joined the poets' guild on the Aventine, where he was almost exactly a contemporary of Ennius; and though he never attained the universal popularity of Plautus, he was held to be only second to him, and by some critics was even preferred. Cicero often quotes him. Horace praises his *gravitas*, an ambiguous term, which may refer either to the moral impressiveness of his maxims or to the emphasis and force

of his style. Although he seems to have kept rather close to his Greek originals he was not very successful in reproducing their best features. There is one short passage, containing the complaint of a husband as to the tyranny of a rich wife, where we can compare the version of Caecilius with its source in Menander; and this shows how much inferior the former is, not merely in grace of expression, but still more in delicacy of thought. More regular than Plautus, more vigorous than Terence, he had not genius enough to place him really on a level with either of these.

2. It is perhaps only one of those stories, so common in literary history, which are invented in order to bring eminent men into connexion with each other; but at any rate it is a pleasing tradition, which tells how Caecilius Statius first came to know his successor in the comic drama. Some twenty years before the death of Caecilius, a boy had been born at Carthage, probably of Numidian rather than Phoenician blood, who fell as a slave into the hands of a Roman noble, Terentius Lucanus. By him he was liberally educated and emancipated, taking as usual his patron's name **Terentius,** and adding the surname **Afer** in token of his origin. In 166 B.C. he had produced a comedy which by the direction of the aediles he had to read to Caecilius. **Terence** (to use the common form of the name) came to him at dinner-time, and as he was meanly dressed, he sat down on a bench at the foot of the dining-couch. But he had only read a few lines when the eminent poet was so struck with the genius of the lad that he bade him take his place at the table at his side. After dinner he read through the play, to the great delight of his critic. There are two serious difficul-

ties in the way of accepting this story. In the first place we have very fair authority for believing that Caecilius died two years before the production of the *Andria*. Of course, there may be some error in the date; but the second is a more serious one. The style of Terence was marked by a finished grace and purity of idiom, which is surprising enough under any circumstances, but which becomes perfectly unintelligible if we do not accept the tradition that he was brought at a very early age into intimate connexion with the most educated circles in Rome. But the associate of men like Scipio and Laelius was not likely to have made his appearance in a dress noticeable for its meanness. Be this as it may, we have good evidence that the poet was barely nineteen years of age when he produced the *Andria*, a play quite as characteristic as any which he wrote. His predecessors had made it their aim to adapt the graceful Athenian comedies to the taste of a much less refined audience, by interspersing them freely with rude jests and giving them an entirely different tone. Terence, writing for a younger generation and moving in different social circles from Plautus, resolved to try whether a more highly developed and widespread culture would not admit of a closer adherence to the lines of the original. It was still by no means a mere translation which he offered, and he made even greater use than his predecessors of "contamination" to increase the plot-interest. But he tried to write as an Athenian, using the Latin language. The scenes which he paints are purely and strictly Greek, with no irregular deviations into Roman customs and local references. His plots are less lively than those of Plautus, but much more artistic and skilfully developed. His characters are less striking and individual, but more within the limits

of human nature. The society to which he introduces us is marked by courtesy, kindliness, and at least superficial refinement; but the easy tolerance of error and even of vice gives to it an unwholesome air of weakness. There is much sentimental emotion, but little strong passion; much psychological analysis of familiar types, but little knowledge either of the heights or of the depths of the human heart. Few even of the Roman writers, who owe so much to it, have shown more of the magic of style, and many of his lines have passed into proverbs. But his excellences, even more than his defects, tended to keep him out of touch with the popular audiences for whom he nominally wrote. His plays never attained great popularity, although they were deservedly favourites with the circle of men of taste and education whose judgment he had probably most in view. With Terence, much more definitely than with Ennius, begins the severance of Latin literature from the current of national life and feeling. The plays of Terence will always deserve our careful study as models of graceful urbane diction; but in the history of Roman thought they are without significance, except as showing to us the nature of the influence which was steadily at work in a narrow circle.

The career of Terence was extremely short. In 160 B.C., when he had already produced six plays, though but twenty-five years of age, he left Rome to travel in Greece. From this journey he never returned, but in the following year died, probably from an attack of fever. It would not be easy to find another instance of a writer dying so young, the whole of whose works bear such slight traces of immaturity.

3. With Terence, Roman comedy, as a form of literature, disappears. A few names are preserved to

us as belonging to play-writers after him, but they are nothing but names. The fact was that the material on which Plautus and Terence had drawn was now exhausted; and the want of any healthy relation between the popular audiences and the literary circles made it impossible that any writer should strike out a line of his own. The old plays were produced over and over again, sometimes with excisions and interpolations, from which some of the comedies of Plautus, as we have them now, seem to have suffered. We have some little knowledge of a Sextus Turpilius, who belongs to the generation after Terence—he died as an old man in 103 B.C.—and from the style of his fragments he seems to have represented the school of Plautus and Caecilius, as opposed to the more elegant and finished language of Terence.

But after the time of Terence the play-wrights turned almost entirely to another style of comedy, known as the *comoedia togata*. In this the characters were drawn from Italian life, though not from Roman. The historian has great reason to regret the loss of these plays, for they would have supplied invaluable material for painting the social life of a time and a district about which we have very little information. But from the literary and still more from the moral point of view, the value of these plays must have been very slight. The most popular producer of them was **Afranius,** of whom we have still a considerable number of fragments; he was preceded by Titinius, and Quinctius Atta, of whom we know less. But all three belonged to good Roman families, and Afranius at least was distinguished for his powers as an orator, so that the composition of these dramatic sketches of humble life may have been rather a diversion than the serious business of their lives.

4. But during the two generations which followed Terence, the strength of the Roman drama lay in tragedy rather than in comedy. We have seen already how those who were the first to introduce Greek plays to a Roman audience devoted themselves, though doubtless not with equal taste or success, to both departments. Livius, Naevius, and Ennius all adapted tragedies as well as comedies, although Naevius was more successful in the latter and Ennius in the former. The love for tragedy which was created thus seems to have lasted till the very end of the Roman Republic. It is true that no school of Latin tragic poets was destined to arise, and the drama never became the natural expression of the thoughts of leading writers. Indeed, if we may judge from the extant fragments, there was little trace of what may be properly called dramatic genius. It was not only that the plots and characters were borrowed from Greek sources; for it is quite possible for the general conception of a character or a situation to be borrowed, while the greatest genius may be shown in its development—as is shown abundantly in the Greek tragedians, who habitually worked upon familiar legends. It is rather that we find no traces of any striking conceptions of characters, or any well-developed and forcibly handled plots. In fact from the beginning, Roman tragedy was marked by that feature, which in later times, when it was entirely severed from the national life, robbed it of such vitality as it had for a time managed to retain:—it was rhetorical and not dramatic. It is a well-known saying that Shakspere would lose less, if he were robbed of all his so-called "beauties," than these passages lose by being taken from their place in his plays. Roman tragedy would have lost almost everything if it had

been deprived of those passages of stately declamation, of high-flown rhetoric, of grave and impressive sententiousness, which appealed strongly to the moral sympathies of the audience, and were quoted with much approval in later generations, but which really have little to do with the proper functions of tragedy. Yet to a nation like the Romans at this period, who were far more advanced in oratory than in any other intellectual accomplishment, it was just this element in the plays, along with the undying attractions of the legends, so old, and yet so new to them, which were vividly brought before an audience little accustomed to reading, and (at any rate at a later time) the splendour of the scenic accessories, which gave to tragedy its lasting popularity.

5. There are only three great names in the history of Roman tragedy, but they cover between them a period of more than a century. The first was Ennius. He was immediately succeeded by his sister's son **M. Pacuvius,** born, like him, in the south of Italy (at Brundusium) in the year before the outbreak of the Second Punic War. His activity may be roughly defined as extending from the death of Ennius down to the time of the fall of Carthage, when he was more than seventy years of age, although he survived until he was ninety. His style was somewhat harsh, and his diction far from pure; he was censured especially for the free use of words compounded in a manner foreign to the genius of the Latin language, though natural enough in Greek, "Nerei repandirostrum incurvicervicum pecus." Horace speaks of him as "learned" or "accomplished"; but the features which strike us most in his fragments are the moral elevation of his tone, and a certain depth of pathos

which recalls to us the most effective oratory of his time. The third tragedian, **L. Accius**, was born just before the death of Ennius; he was the most productive of all these early poets, and continued to write throughout the latter half of the second century before Christ, and perhaps into the first century—say from the fall of Carthage to the Civil Wars of Marius and Sulla. He did not confine himself to dramatic composition, but wrote in verse on questions of literary criticism and history, and even attempted epic poetry, though little or nothing of this remains to us. Perhaps more than any of the tragedians, he aimed at moral impressiveness, to which his oratorical force and fervour largely conduced. But besides this, his writings bore traces of considerable descriptive power, and of a true love for nature, which is to our modern notions singularly absent from much of the classical poetry both of Greece and of Rome. He well maintained the traditions of the school to which he belonged; but he cannot be said to mark any great advance, even in one respect in which advance might well have been anticipated. In spite of the pains and study which he gave to literary composition, the style of tragedy remained in his hands still far short of the ease and grace which had already been reached in comedy. It was forcible, grave, effective, but as yet without harmony, finish, and subtlety. Terence remained in his own line unsurpassed; but more than a century passed after his death before the Romans learnt what their language was capable of becoming and doing in the hands of a master of serious poetry.

6. **Satire.**—But side by side with these attempts of the tragedians to reproduce a foreign style of literature, handling the legends of the past, and only

indirectly related to the events and the feelings of the time, there sprang up a new kind of composition dealing directly with the personal interests of those by whom and for whom it was written. The *satura* of Ennius had been a medley of the most miscellaneous nature, to which no definite character could be assigned. In the generation which followed him it was so transformed as to become the parent of what ever since that time has been known as *satire*. The creator of this, the most original and characteristic branch of Roman literature, was **Gaius Lucilius** of Aurunca. The best authorities now assign as the year of his birth that following the death of Ennius (168 B.C.) By his position as a Latin, not possessing the full Roman franchise, he was excluded from public life; but his wealth, his learning, and his genius opened his way into the highest circles at Rome. He was on intimate terms with the younger Scipio, with his friend Laelius, and with others of those educated Roman nobles who had been the patrons of Terence and the chief encouragers of Greek culture at Rome. But while he was widely familiar with Greek learning, he took none of the Greek writers as his model, and certainly never learnt from them those lessons of reserve, simplicity, and finish of style of which they are the unequalled teachers. In the bitterness of his personal attacks and the outspoken vigour of his invective he reminds us of the writers of the Old Comedy; but he had none of the delicate humour, the dainty lyric grace, and the airy fancy which is conspicuous in the satire of Aristophanes. In his style he caught happily the tone current in the higher circles of the capital, so that later critics are unanimous in praise of his "urbanity"; but he was far too hasty and careless

in his composition to satisfy a chastened taste. His verse was rough and jolting; the hexameters which he chiefly used were certainly no advance in rhythm upon those of Ennius; and as to their diction, Horace justly says of them that if the order of the words was changed no one would know that he was not reading prose. Slovenly repetitions, loose constructions, coarse expressions abound, and nowhere is there the true poetic touch which glorifies common things with the magic of fancy or of pathos. His topics too were treated with garrulous discursiveness; there was no aspect of the public or literary life of his time with which he did not deal, often, so far as we can see, with little choice or order. He made his verse a criticism of life in the widest sense. His success was rapid, and the manner in which Horace speaks of him a century later shows that it was lasting. This was partly due to the strength and sincerity of his writing, which appealed directly to a public on whom the delicate finish of Terence was lost; partly no doubt to the close personal relation which he established with his readers. It was something at once new and delightful to be brought into immediate contact with such a vigorous and widely accomplished nature. He poured forth his loves and his hates; he told of his travels and his amusements; he dealt out his literary and political satire, all with the most unsparing frankness. The whole life of the old poet, as Horace says, lay open to view as in a picture. We can only judge of him by fragments, numerous but disjointed and often corrupt; but if we may correct our judgment of these by the influence which he had upon later writers, and the verdict passed by critics who knew his works more completely, there are few losses in Roman literature

more to be regretted than that of the Thirty Books of the Satires of Lucilius.

7. The half-century which followed the death of Lucilius (102 B.C.) has left us no Latin poetry: and there is no reason to believe that any was produced which deserved to live. For this there were two main reasons. The attempts of the Gracchi at reform had failed, and left the state in a worse state than that in which they had found it. The old order was shaken, to pass away in long and bloody civil wars; the new order was not yet founded. Men had little leisure in the fierce strife of parties for literary pursuits. But a still more powerful cause was to be found in the direction which literature had taken. It was wholly based on an imitation of the Greek, but this imitation had stifled rather than stimulated the creative efforts of the Romans. The dependence upon foreign models had restricted authorship to a class; but this class was now sufficiently educated to feel how vastly inferior their imitations were to the originals; and yet they had not learnt how to approach them more closely. A few of the Roman nobles still endeavoured to reproduce the lighter verse of the Alexandrian poets, or to continue the tradition of the annalistic verse of Ennius, but their attempts hardly deserve our notice.

8. **Growth of Latin Prose.**—But this time of dearth of poetry was the time of the creation of Latin prose. Not indeed of prose literature. There is as complete an absence of great writers in prose as in verse. But a prose style was being gradually but surely formed by the practice of public speaking. Some good critics have regarded this as the golden period of Roman oratory. The intensity of political life, which precluded all serious devotion to poetry,

acted as a keen spur to the study and practice of rhetoric. The nobles of the old families had to hold their own in the constant struggles of the popular assemblies and the law-courts by their powers of oratory, and the "new men," if they did not win distinction on the field of battle, saw that their only chance of rising was by success in the same conflicts. Before the middle of the second century before Christ, Greek rhetoricians had opened schools at Rome, and from this time forward the practice of declaiming in Greek according to their rules formed a part of the usual training of a Roman noble. The careful attention to the structure of sentences and the arrangement of arguments, which this habit required, could not be without its effect upon Latin oratory. But at first its influence was indirect. The younger men picked up their skill in rhetoric, like their knowledge of law and of constitutional usage, by attendance on older friends, whose practice they noted, and whose hints they occasionally received. Cicero speaks of Marcus Lepidus Porcina (consul 137 B.C.) as the first Roman orator who was guided by the rules of art. The brilliant and passionate oratory of Gaius Gracchus owed much to his Greek culture, still more to his fervid temper, but little to any formal or systematic training. Yet his language was not only clear and forcible; it shows signs of harmonious structure. The two great orators of the next generation, Marcus Antonius and L. Licinius Crassus, in the same way developed their powers by practice in public life and observation of native models. It was only when the latter were at the height of their fame that a Roman knight, L. Aelius Stilo, included in the teaching in Latin literature which he gave to his younger friends a critical study of Latin oratory.

Still the close relation of public speaking to the practical affairs of life saved the Romans from a taste for idle declamation. When schools of Latin rhetoric were opened, they were looked upon with contempt and aversion. The greatest orator of the age, Crassus himself, was the man who as censor closed these "schools of impudence," which trained to an empty fluency based upon no sound knowledge. The evil was only postponed. But it was a good thing for Latin prose that its powers were at first developed in a healthier air. Its creators knew how to learn the lessons which the Greek masters could teach them without losing anything of their own vigorous independence; careful study never sank into slavish imitation. Whatever was borrowed was transformed into a shape adapted to the genius of the Latin language. The extant fragments of the earlier Roman orators are too scanty to allow us to trace in detail the development of Latin prose. But there is one book, dating just before the publication of Cicero's earliest works, which enables us to judge fairly of the state in which the great orator found his native language. This is a treatise on Rhetoric addressed to one Herennius, and commonly ascribed, though perhaps without sufficient reason, to Q. Cornificius. It is of interest as showing us how an eminent teacher was able to borrow what was of use in the Greek authorities without losing his own strong common sense and masculine judgment. It is still more important as proving how Latin had become a fit organ for literary purposes. Something was still to be done in bringing out the fulness of its resources, in enriching its rhythm, and in adding to its dignity and grace. But prose, which had started so much later in the race, had now manifestly overtaken verse, and

the former was nearing its maturity, while the latter was struggling with the difficulties that had embarrassed its earlier stages.

PART II

THE GOLDEN AGE OF LATIN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

CICERO

1. THE name which rises first to our minds when we think of Latin prose is that of Cicero. The corresponding name for Latin verse is that of Vergil. Exactly one generation separates the birth of the former from the birth of the latter. The fact is of great significance, and marks the natural division of the Golden Age. Cicero is the most prominent figure in the literature of the Republic; Vergil in the literature of the Empire. We shall have then to consider first the age of Cicero, a generation of prose-writers with two conspicuous poets. Then we shall pass to the age of Vergil, a generation of poets with one great master of prose.

2. **Marcus Tullius Cicero** was born at Arpinum, one of the most delightful spots in southern Latium. He had one brother, Quintus,

some three years his junior. His father was a Roman knight of weak health, who spent most of his time in study. At an early age he was sent with his brother to Rome to pursue his studies there, along with the sons of his uncle Aculeo, who early introduced him into the best circles of the capital. His education was conducted mainly by Greek teachers of literature, rhetoric, and philosophy; but at least as important a part of it consisted in listening to the conversation and the speeches of the great orators Crassus and Antonius, and the eminent lawyer Scaevola. Cicero tells us, too, that he was a pupil of the Greek poet Archias; but the strong love and intimate knowledge which his writings show of the older Latin dramatic and epic writers prove that he must have studied these with care. Indeed his appetite for all forms of learning was insatiable. "Night and day," he says, "I used to plunge into every kind of study." He was impelled as much by intellectual curiosity as by ambition. The latter urged him to the constant practice of rhetorical exercises, that eloquence might fit him for the highest posts in public life. The former made him an eager and devoted student of philosophy. Before he was sixteen years of age he attended the lectures of the Epicurean philosopher Phaedrus,—doubtless delivered in Greek,—and naturally was at once converted to his views. About the same time he studied logic with the Stoic Diodotus, who was for many years an inmate of his house. But two years later the famous [illegible] head of the Academic School, came [illegible] and under the influence of his acuteness and eloquence Cicero at once embraced the Academic theories, to which he remained faithful throughout his life. It must be remembered that at this time philosophy really took the place of

religion for an educated Roman. The priests were only state officials, often distinguished generals and statesmen, charged with the performance of the traditional rites in honour of gods in whom they had ceased to have any real belief. All serious thought as to the conduct of life was based upon the doctrines of philosophy. We can well believe then that Cicero studied it with diligence and earnestness. The Social War gave Cicero an opportunity of serving in two campaigns; but his tastes were not for war. During the civil discord which followed he was training the powers of oratory, which as yet he had no chance of exercising. He also attempted poetry, writing one original poem on a Greek legend, and translating two Greek poems on astronomy. He had no poetic imagination, but the command that he was already acquiring over the resources of the Latin language showed itself in a diction more choice and refined, and in verse more flowing and finished than any which had preceded him, so far as we can judge. Even these youthful poems appear to have been studied with care and profit by later poets of far more original genius. By the time that he was five-and-twenty he had already spoken several times in the law-courts; and in his twenty-seventh year he defended one Sextus Roscius, who was accused of murder. This is the first important speech which has come down to us. He was brilliantly successful, and soon became popular as an advocate. But his health broke down under his incessant toil, and to recruit he travelled for two years in Greece and the East. It is significant of the importance attached by the Romans to thorough training in oratory, that though Cicero had already established his reputation, he gave up much of his time abroad to taking lessons

in rhetoric as well as philosophy at Athens and at Rhodes. When he returned to Rome in his thirtieth year, he was, as he tells us, like a new man. He was fully master of all that could be learnt from the Greeks; he had had extensive practice in speaking, his stores of legal and philosophical knowledge were rich, his style was perfectly matured. Nothing was now wanting but the opportunity to prove himself, what he already was, the greatest of Roman orators.

3. **Style of Cicero.**—The creation of an artistic prose is no easy matter. It must be, what Aristotle held that all virtues were, the mean between two extremes. It must be clearer and more natural than poetry, more harmonious, more elevated, and more exact than the talk of daily life. Thus there are dangers on either hand. They had been avoided in the best days of Attic prose (Jebb, *Primer*, Part II. ch. iii.) But the decay in the free political life of Greece had been followed by a decline in taste. A style came to be especially in vogue in the schools of Asia Minor which was thence called *Asianism*, but it was much more widely spread, and really denoted the *new* as opposed to the *old* ideal. Its main feature was *display*, sometimes in the direction of bombastic inflation, sometimes in that of brilliant antitheses and conceits. In sharp contrast with the best classical work in any form of art, the whole was less thought of than the parts; and any kind of tinsel ornament was used without taste or self-restraint. But a sounder study of the theory of rhetoric had brought some teachers back to the earlier models; and hence they were known as *Atticists*. Their judgment was sober, and their criticism invaluable. They did not found a school of oratory, at least in Greece; but they greatly

modified the form which Greek influence should take at Rome. Now the teachers of the school at Rhodes, Apollonius and Molon, under whom Cicero chiefly studied, although they did not belong altogether to the Atticists, came much nearer to them than to the Asianists. The style to which Cicero was trained was that of Isocrates, purified by a study of the Attic orators from the extravagances which had corrupted it. Some writers have held that this was far too florid and declamatory; and that Cicero's oratory would have been much purer in style if he had copied more closely the earlier Atticists. But it by no means follows that the style which is best for Greek is also the best for another language. Attic Greek is itself so clear and beautiful, even in its simplest forms, that it can well dispense with ornament in cases where the same form of expression in a weaker and harsher language would be intolerably bald and poor. Cicero himself never wavered in his admiration for the purest models of Attic eloquence. If he did not copy them more closely, this may well have been because he knew how much less perfectly his own language could satisfy the ear without the aid of a richer vocabulary and more elaborate rhythm.

4. **Cicero's Speeches.** — From the date of Cicero's return to Rome until his death more than thirty years after, he was almost constantly engaged as a speaker either in the law-courts or afterwards also in the popular assemblies and in the Senate. Of the speeches which he delivered, not less than fifty-seven have come down to us, more or less complete, though the genuineness of some four or five of these is doubtful. It is therefore impossible to give even a short account of them all, and in many cases it would

require a sketch of the historical circumstances to make them intelligible. Among the most important are the seven in which some seven years after his return he attacked the misgovernment of Verres in Sicily, and at the same time gave a splendid proof how far more effective his style of oratory was than the Asiatic rhetoric of Hortensius, then the recognised "king of the law-courts." These "Verrine" speeches deserve to be noticed too as the only ones which he delivered as prosecutor; from that time forward he appeared in criminal trials only as counsel for the defence; though many passages both in his speeches in the law-courts and in his political orations show that his powers of attack were almost unequalled. The four speeches against Catilina in his consulship, and the fourteen against Antonius (among which the second is much the most important), delivered in the last year of his life, stand out as unrivalled specimens of unsparing and sustained invective. Of his speeches at the bar, that in defence of Murena (63 B.C.) is conspicuous for wit and humour, that for Cluentius (66 B.C.) for the masterly skill with which he tells a complicated story, colouring it throughout in the interests of his client; in his defence of Sestius he shows equal skill in narrating the political events of two most eventful years, and in defending his own line of action: his speech for Milo is throughout a crushing exposure of his personal enemy Clodius. Some have doubted whether he was a good advocate; but the best answer to this is the demand that there was for his services, and the fact that when two or three were engaged in a case, he always spoke last, as being likely to leave the deepest impression on the jury. Of his political speeches we have but few addressed to the people; most were spoken in the Senate, where his

own party was in a great majority; but if we may trust one story told of his consulship, he was not without an orator's greatest power, that of charming and winning over a hostile audience. It must be remembered also that many of the trials in which he was engaged were really political struggles; and further, that as the law-courts met often in the open forum, addresses to the jury were really directed to a large popular audience. If we estimate Cicero by the success which he gained during his lifetime, and by the influence which his style had on his countrymen after his death, and even for centuries later, on all who used the Latin language, he must be accounted one of the greatest of orators.

5. **Cicero's Epistles.**—But Cicero's speeches do not form more than about one-third of his works as they have come down to us.

Some 200 years after his death a learned Roman wrote, "I think that all the letters of Cicero deserve to be read even more than his speeches. There is nothing more perfect than his letters." It is hard to compare two forms of literature so unlike as letters and speeches; but the former may be admitted to be perfect of their kind. We have three important collections of them. One consists of sixteen books, and has the simple title *Epistulae*. Sometimes they are called *Epistulae ad Familiares*, but this name is incorrect, for they are not by any means all addressed to intimate friends. Another name which has sometimes been given to them, *Epistulae ad Diversos*, is even worse; for it is very bad Latin. These books were published after Cicero's death by his faithful freedman M. Tullius Tiro. They are arranged in no chronological order, but are grouped according to the persons to whom they were addressed; the eighth book, however, con-

sists not of letters written by Cicero, but of letters written to him by Caelius. Probably the first twelve books were published first, and then the remaining four as *addenda* in later editions. The thirteenth consists wholly of letters of introduction, the fourteenth contains letters to his own family, and the sixteenth letters to Tiro. There is reason to believe that much larger collections were published at a later time, including four books of letters to Pompeius and three of letters to Caesar, but these have been lost. Then there is a second equally important collection of sixteen books of letters addressed to his most intimate friend T. Pomponius Atticus; and a third of much less extent, containing three books of letters to his brother Quintus.

These three collections of letters are of the greatest importance, both for the history of the time and for the character of the writer. They show the widest differences in tone and style. Some of them are formal and elaborate, written to great officials, with whom he was on no terms of intimacy, and virtually political manifestoes intended for a wide circle of readers. Others are courteous and skilful pieces of diplomacy, in which the purpose of the writer and the conventions of society exclude any frank expression of his real sentiments. But the great majority were written, with no thought of publication, simply to give an intimate friend the current news of the capital or to pour out the emotions of the moment. This is especially the case with the letters to Atticus. A statesman who has played an important part in a great crisis of his country's history has seldom, if ever, left accessible such a complete revelation of his inmost thoughts and feelings as Cicero has given us in this collection of Epistles. His elation at success, his depression in failure and exile, his perplexities

and hesitations, his fears and hopes in politics, his literary projects and his philosophic studies, his pecuniary difficulties and his plans for buying and building, all are revealed to us with absolute sincerity, and not without many a touch of egotism. At one time he tells his friend how a speech was received with thunders of applause, and how he "smashed" an opponent in the Senate; at another he ruefully confesses that he "knows he has been a regular donkey." It is largely from these letters that critics who have taken a harsh view of his character have drawn the materials for their censures of his weakness, vanity, and inconsistency. A kindlier and juster judgment will find in them evidence rather of a highly sensitive and emotional nature, changeful in its moods, and readily passing into extremes, but quick in its sympathies, brilliant in its versatility, and attracting with a charm that rarely fails.

The style of the letters is naturally far different from that of the speeches. In its language it comes much nearer to that of the comic drama than would have been legitimate in formal public utterances. It is only in the inimitable vividness of narrative, the happy dramatic touches, the life like sketches of character that we are reminded of the orator in his lighter moods, when he allowed himself to appear as the prince of Roman story-tellers. The ample rolling periods, in which the position and the rhythm of every word are artfully calculated to give the fullest satisfaction to the ear as well as to the mind of the hearer, are replaced by brief and half-finished sentences, often rapidly dashed off while the messenger was waiting, and sometimes only hinting at the meaning, which the friend who was to receive them could fill up for himself. To us these

letters present many a difficulty, which the ingenuity of modern scholars has tried in vain to solve; but when all deductions are made they remain a priceless contribution to the history of the time. The earliest dates from 68 B.C., the latest from 43 B.C.; and although there are unfortunate gaps, especially when Atticus was himself at Rome, there are few periods, until we come down to quite recent times, for which we have as much and as valuable contemporary evidence as that which is furnished for the closing years of the Roman republic by the letters of Cicero.

6. **Cicero's Dialogues.**—Another very important part of the writings of Cicero consists in his *dialogues*. These are of two kinds, and belong to two different periods of his life; though some of each kind belong to each period. First there are the dialogues which deal with *rhetoric*. When Cicero returned from exile in Sept. 57 B.C., he found that his power and independence as a statesman were gone. The combination of Caesar, Pompeius, and Crassus was irresistible. The party of the Senate had neither the courage nor the power to oppose them, and Cicero was compelled to go with the stream. At first he tried to maintain some boldness and freedom of action. But, as he says himself, "those who had clipped his wings did not care to see them sprouting again." His oratory was still a force in the state, but he did not venture to use it except in accordance with the wishes of the triumvirs. Hence he found vent for his restless activity in literature. For the use of the *dialogue* there were numerous precedents in Greek. It had been employed with brilliant success by Plato, calling out at once his dramatic skill and humour, and also the method, which he had learnt from Socrates, of searching for truth by means of question and

answer. Many other Greek writers, both before and after Plato, had also written dialogues, sometimes only as studies of character and manners, sometimes in order to set forth in an agreeable form the writer's views. To the latter class belonged the dialogues of Aristotle, now entirely lost, but warmly praised by ancient critics. In these there was little, if any, attempt to *search* for truth, but rather an *exposition* of the author's opinions, either in his own person or in that of some one who was understood to represent him. Now these dialogues of Aristotle were the model which Cicero desired to follow in giving to the world his views on the art of rhetoric. The attempt was not wholly new in Latin literature. Nearly a century earlier the dialogue had been used by Marcus Brutus as a means of giving instruction in law. There were also Latin treatises on rhetoric, one of which has already been mentioned, while another —an unfinished one—had been commenced by Cicero himself in his youth. But what was new was, on the one hand, the application of the highly finished style of the best Latin prose to such subjects; and, on the other hand, the rejection of the technical and useless refinements of the theorists in favour of the ripe practical experience of a great master of the art of public speaking.

7. In the three books *De Oratore*, finished in 54 B.C., Cicero professes to give an account of a two days' discussion held in the autumn of 91 B.C. at the Tusculan villa of the great orator L. Licinius Crassus. The characters in the dialogue are Crassus himself and his friendly rival M. Antonius, with two younger orators, P. Sulpicius and C. Cotta, and, for part of the discussion, the father-in-law of Crassus, Quintus Scaevola, and the half-brothers Quintus Catulus and

C. Julius Caesar. In the first book the question chiefly discussed is the extent of the attainments needed by the orator. Crassus, here expressing the views of Cicero himself, argues for the widest possible training in law and philosophy; Antonius, on the other hand, contends that for the practical duties of the orator, natural gifts, combined with experience and intelligent observation, furnish all that is needed. In the second book, which gives the discussion of the morning of the second day, Antonius, after criticising the rhetoric commonly taught in the schools, gives the results of his own experience as to "invention," *i.e.* the discovery of effective arguments; touching more briefly upon the means of winning the favour and exciting the emotions of the audience; Caesar discourses, with many illustrations, on the province of wit and humour in oratory; and Antonius concludes by treating the questions of arrangement and of memory. In the third book, which reports the conversation of the afternoon of the second day, Crassus, the acknowledged master of style in his own day, discourses on propriety and elegance in diction, and on oratorical rhythm, and closes with a detailed treatment of delivery and action. The attractiveness of this, perhaps the greatest of all the works of Cicero, lies in the combination of its various charms. The writer is dealing with a subject of which he was the unrivalled master, and we feel throughout that he is speaking with the most thorough knowledge and the deepest personal interest. The characters in the dialogue are among the most famous men in Roman history, and they bear themselves with a stately courtesy and grace worthy of their high position. The date of the dialogue gives to it the mellow tone of a not too distant past. The style is that of Cicero

at his best, showing greater freedom and lightness than that of the speeches, but never sinking into baldness or carelessness.

8. When this was published, Cicero turned next to political philosophy. He tells his brother Quintus that he finds it a tough job, and if he cannot succeed in it he will throw his work into the sea which lies before him, as he writes in a villa by the bay of Naples, and take up something else, "for rest I cannot." On the treatise *De Republica*, then produced, he spent immense pains, first writing it in two books, then expanding it into nine, and finally reducing it to six; and both the writer and his friends seem to have regarded it with great satisfaction. But for many centuries it was wholly lost, and it was only in 1822 that large portions of it were found to be underlying the later writing, containing a commentary of St. Augustine, in a MS. of the Vatican. Unfortunately these portions are very fragmentary; and we cannot form any clear notion of the way in which Cicero treated the constitution of Rome, the foundations of society, the training and the duties of citizens, and the other important topics on which he touched. He says that he was largely indebted to the Greek philosophers and historians; but we may be sure that he added much himself from his own wide knowledge and experience of political life. The dialogue is assigned to the younger Scipio and the famous circle that gathered round him about a generation before the birth of Cicero: the writer professes to have heard the substance of it from one of the characters whom he had seen in his youth.

9. After the completion of this treatise Cicero appears to have wished to follow it with a kind of supplement on the origin and the nature of laws

(*De Legibus*), with suggestions for a model code, and criticisms on the Roman and other systems of law. Three books of this work still remain; at one time there were probably more, but the treatise was never finished. It was interrupted by Cicero's departure from Rome as governor of Cilicia; and he never took the subject up again. It is not only incomplete, but it has plainly not been revised for publication, and some parts are only sketched out. But the work preserves much valuable information, and is also of interest as being the only one of his dialogues in which Cicero has taken Plato for his model, omitting any formal introduction. But he copies Aristotle rather in taking the leading part in the dialogue himself, with his brother Quintus and his friend Atticus to share in the discussion.

10. Now followed a long gap in Cicero's literary activity. The exacting duties of his governorship, discharged by him with his usual energy, left him no time for any writing except that required by his large correspondence. He returned to Rome only to find the civil war on the point of breaking out, and it was not until the autumn of 47 B.C. that he was able to return to his peaceful life in one of his country villas. His first occupation was to complete the series of his *rhetorical* treatises. The *Brutus*, written in 46 B.C., is a sketch of the history of eloquence at Rome, in the form of a conversation in which Cicero himself takes the lead, while Brutus and Atticus have more subordinate parts. It gives us invaluable materials for understanding one of the most important sides of Roman culture; and the criticisms of Greek and Roman orators, with which it abounds, come from one who by study and practice was a complete master of his subject. Somewhat later in the year Cicero wrote,

in compliance with repeated requests from Brutus, a treatise entitled *Orator*. This is a sketch of the ideal orator, and is really a defence of Cicero's own position, removed alike from the florid redundance of the Asiatic school, and from the simple and unadorned Atticism of some of the younger public speakers, to which Brutus himself seems to have inclined. By far the greater part of the treatise is taken up with a discussion of the appropriate style for the orator; and questions of rhythm and euphony are treated at what might seem to us quite disproportionate length. Yet we learn from other sources also that these had immense effect upon a Roman audience, and could not be neglected by one who wished to make his oratory a political power. About the same time Cicero wrote a kind of elementary catechism called *Partitiones Oratoriae*, consisting of answers to questions put by his son, and giving a clear and systematic account of formal rhetoric. Two or three years later he completed his works on this subject, by drawing up, when on a coasting voyage, in eight days and from memory, a treatise giving the substance of Aristotle's teaching on *Topics*, or the means of finding arguments.

Cicero's rhetorical works do not retain the interest for us now which was felt in them at a time when the art of oratory was more generally studied; but they by no means deserve to be neglected. On the one hand, they are the very earliest specimens of an artistic Latin prose, written to be read and not to be spoken; and on the other hand, they are inspired with the enthusiasm and the depth of conviction of one who knew that he owed all his fame and power to the art which he was trying to teach those who would follow in his steps.

11. But the events of Cicero's life now led his thoughts to a different theme. From his wife Terentia he had become gradually estranged, and towards the end of 46 B.C. he divorced her. To his only daughter Tullia he was devotedly attached. Her death early in 45 B.C. was a shattering blow to him. He was plunged into the bitterest grief, and only after a time was able to find some comfort in studying and writing on philosophy. During the year and a half which followed her death, he poured out a succession of treatises with astonishing rapidity. There was method in the order which he adopted. After a brief *Consolatio*, or essay on the means of lessening grief (now lost), he wrote first a treatise, also no longer extant, entitled *Hortensius*, on the value of the study of philosophy. This is known to us mainly from the account which St. Augustine gives of the wonderfully inspiring effect which it had upon him when a young student. Then he turned to consider those primary questions which underlie all philosophy, as to the trustworthiness of the means which we have for arriving at positive knowledge. In two books of *Academica*, afterwards expanded into four, he discusses the view of the New Academy, that certainty could not be attained, and that, as Butler put it, probability was the guide of life, giving to this theory his own approval, and taking occasion in passing to defend warmly the novel attempt to treat philosophical questions in Latin. We have unfortunately only a very small portion of the later edition, in which Varro was represented as his chief opponent, and about half of the earlier edition, in which the same office was assigned to Lucullus. Next comes the most important and finished of his philosophical works, bearing the title *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*.

The question, which divided more sharply than any other the ancient schools of philosophy, had reference to the ultimate ends (*fines*) of human action, or, what came to the same thing, the supreme good and evil for man. The schools which had most influence at Rome at this time, the Stoics and the Epicureans, were especially opposed on this point; for while the latter held that the *summum bonum* was *pleasure*, the former maintained not less stoutly that it was *virtue*. The five books *De Finibus* contain the report of three quite distinct discussions, held at different times and by different speakers, upon this important topic. In the first book Cicero represents himself as drawing from a prominent Epicurean a statement of the views of his school, to which he himself replies from the Stoic point of view in the second book. This dialogue is assigned to 50 B.C. In the third book we are carried back two years earlier, and Cato is introduced, maintaining the Stoic views upon ethics in all their rigour, while in the fourth book Cicero criticises them, employing in his attack the arguments of the New Academy. The fifth book goes back to the time of Cicero's early manhood (79 B.C.), and the scene is laid at Athens, where M. Pupius Piso advocates the theories of Aristotle as to the Supreme Good, while Cicero puts forward in reply the objections of the Stoics. We have thus a tolerably complete exposition and criticism of all the leading opinions on the theoretical side of moral philosophy.

12. Shortly after the *De Finibus*, *i.e.* early in 44 B.C., appeared five books of *Tusculanae Disputationes*, discussions supposed to have been held at Cicero's villa at Tusculum. These deal with philosophical questions in a more popular way, almost exclusively from the point of view of the Stoics. The dramatic form

of the dialogue is not happily managed, for Cicero's opponent is but a man of straw, and there is no real debate. But the attractive nature of the subjects, and the liveliness with which they are treated, with abundance of illustration from Roman poetry and history, have always made this one of the most popular of Cicero's works. The topics treated are the wisdom of despising death, the endurance of pain (with an argument that pain is no evil), the wise man's insensibility to sorrow and his freedom from all mental disturbance, and finally a demonstration that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness. The book has been described as "a work of despair," written at a time when everything but good conscience seemed lost beyond recovery; and, more than almost any of Cicero's writings, it leaves the impression of an earnestness which felt, if it did not always lay to heart, the lessons which it was teaching. Some of the Stoic views on ethics had been already treated in a much lighter spirit by Cicero in his *Paradoxa*, which, though issued not long before the *De Finibus*, had in part at least been written some years earlier, thus giving us probably his first, still hardly serious attempt at moral philosophy.

13. Next Cicero turned his attention to religion, and within an incredibly short time after the appearance of the Tusculan Disputations, published three books on the *Nature of the Gods*. The conversation which they report is supposed to have been held at the house of C. Aurelius Cotta, the chief pontiff, about 76 B.C. In the first book Velleius, after reviewing the opinions of earlier philosophers, states and warmly defends the theories of Epicurus, which are then severely criticised by Cotta, from the point of view of the New Academy. In the second book Lucilius

Balbus gives the arguments by which the Stoics supported their belief in an active and beneficent Providence, and the most complete statement, which has come down to us from the ancient world, of those facts in the structure of the world and its inhabitants, which lead to the doctrines of natural religion. In the third book Cotta attacks the Stoics from an agnostic standpoint, not so much denying their conclusions as arguing that the evidence is not sufficient to support them.

A natural sequel to this is furnished by the two books *De Divinatione*, or "on Revelation" as we should call them, issued shortly after the murder of Caesar. In the first Cicero's brother Quintus argues in favour of the Stoic doctrine that the gods made their will known to men by dreams, oracles, omens, and the like, quoting many instances in which the predictions thence derived had been verified. In the second book Cicero himself reproduces the argument of the New Academy against this view, holding that divination was altogether a delusion, and that seeming instances of success were to be explained by chance, and upholding what he held to be true religion as contrasted with superstition. This work gives us much valuable information on an interesting side of Roman life and thought. The treatise *De Fato*, or "Destiny," which was written to complete Cicero's system of religious philosophy, has only come down to us in an imperfect form, and seems to have been an unsuccessful and probably unfinished attempt to deal with the perplexing problem of free will.

14. Cicero's literary leisure was now drawing to an end, but he still found time for one more important treatise and two or three slighter dialogues. The first consisted of three books *De Officiis* or "Moral Duties,"

written as a systematic manual for his son, now studying philosophy at Athens. It is therefore not controversial, but dogmatic in its teaching. The first book deals with *virtue* (*honestum*), under its four heads of wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance; the second with *expediency* (*utile*), and the proper ways of securing what is to our interest; the third with cases where virtue and expediency seem to be in conflict; here it is argued, with copious illustrations, that there can never be any real conflict, and that the virtuous course is always in the long-run the expedient also. The two little dialogues of a slightly earlier date, the *Cato Maior* or "Old Age" and the *Laelius* or "Friendship," are among the best known and most charming of his slighter works. The former is perhaps somewhat tinged with sophistry, and logic is strained in defence of a paradox; the latter has all the warmth of feeling and depth of conviction of one of the most loyal and affectionate of friends, and Cicero's literary art is nowhere better shown than in the setting of these dialogues.

The *De Officiis* was hardly published when Cicero returned to Rome to take an active part in politics; and little more than a year had passed when he fell beneath the swords of his murderers.

15. Few works in literature have been so variously estimated as the philosophical writings of Cicero. At one time they were regarded as almost inspired. They were the text-books in the schools, the models for scholars, the supreme authorities alike for style and for thought. Latterly there has been a reaction, and no words of contempt are too strong for these "third-rate copies of second-rate Greek originals." Neither judgment is just. If thoroughness, consistency, and originality are the necessary marks of a

philosopher, then Cicero has little claim to the name. His philosophy is often superficial; he holds to the moral system of the Stoics, while acknowledging that it cannot stand the criticism of the Academics; he is indebted on every page to Greek writers, and long passages, or even whole books, are little more than free translations from them. There are many traces of the headlong haste at which his treatises were compiled, while he hurried from one subject to another as a distraction from his grief. But on the other hand it must not be forgotten that Cicero had been a devoted student of philosophy from his earliest years. He had lived in intimacy with the most distinguished teachers of all schools. Even in his busiest days his greatest delight had been to get away to his books. Philosophy was in the decay of the national religion, no intellectual amusement, but the true guide to life. If he wrote rapidly, he wrote on subjects upon which he had long reflected, and from the stores of a richly furnished mind. He was thoroughly familiar with the points in dispute, and with the best authorities upon them. And, so far as we can now discover, he seems to have followed the best authorities. He probably made no important contributions to philosophy himself, except so far as the judgment of a man of wide experience in the practical business of life is necessarily of value. But he has preserved for us an immense amount of information which otherwise would have perished; he has given us the leading thoughts of the teachers of his own time in a form far more attractive than that in which they were themselves able to clothe them; he furnished to his own generation hand-books of philosophy, lacking in rigour and precision, but glowing with a genuine enthusiasm for all that was elevating

and ennobling; and he produced in a language, never before successfully used for the purpose, copious texts in a style so firm and fluent, so clear and rich, that they became at once the models, never to be surpassed, of that important form of literature. This was no unworthy outcome of some eighteen months' leisure on the part of one who had passed his sixtieth year, lonely, disappointed, and bereaved.

CHAPTER II

CICERO'S PROSE CONTEMPORARIES

1. **Varro.**—Of the contemporaries of Cicero only some three or four have left us prose-writings of any importance. The eldest of these, **M. Terentius Varro**, was born ten years before Cicero, in the Sabine town of Reate. In spite of the distractions of an active public life, he made himself known as the most learned man of his age, and produced an enormous mass of literature. He wrote much poetry, mainly satirical; but in prose his chief works dealt either with history and antiquities, or with various sciences. Under the former head, his great work was the *Antiquities*, divided into two sections: in the former, twenty-five books treated of "Things Human;" in the latter, sixteen were devoted to "Things Divine." From the latter we have many interesting quotations in the early Christian Fathers; of the former we know much less. Of all his numerous treatises on art and sciences, there are now extant only six imperfect books (out of twenty-five) on the Latin language, and three books on Agriculture. The former work is very

rough, harsh, and often obscure in style, with no kind of artistic polish. The latter is much more readable, and some of the dialogue and its setting is lively and dramatic. But apart from the information contained in the book, its main value is as showing what a great work Cicero did in elevating and polishing the style of literary prose.

2. **Caesar.**—The second of the prose-writers contemporary with Cicero, only four years his junior was **Gaius Julius Caesar.** The political life of this, the greatest of all the great men of antiquity, does not concern us here. We have only to deal with him as a speaker and a writer. As an orator, he was admitted to stand second only to Cicero. He cared little about preserving his speeches, but some of them were extant centuries later, though none have come down to us. He was distinguished, we are told, partly by his rapid energy, partly by the choiceness and purity of his language, coming naturally to one who moved in the highest circles of the capital, and improved by careful literary studies. Cicero, too, praises his brilliant style, set off by a spirited high-bred delivery. As a writer, he is known to every schoolboy by his *Commentarii* or "Memoranda" on the Gallic and Civil Wars. During his consulship in 59 B.C. he received from the people a special commission as governor of Gaul and Illyricum. Entering upon his government the next year, in seven campaigns he had reduced the whole of Transalpine Gaul to submission, put down several formidable risings, and invaded with at least partial success both Britain and Germany. When in 51 B.C. his work seemed done, he drew up and published, doubtless from notes taken at the time, a report of it. Its object was plainly to represent the several stages in a conquest

which had added so largely to the Roman Empire, and had left him at the head of a powerful veteran army, as defensive measures, forced on him by the needs of the time. The style is admirably suited to his purpose. Its perfect clearness leaves the strongest impression of candour. There is no eloquence to lead us to suspect exaggeration, no embellishments to detract from the simplicity of the effect. Even passages which are rhetorical seem to be so only from the way in which facts are grouped so as to tell their tale for themselves. It is only when we examine the narrative critically that we see how admirable is the art of this simplicity. It retains the same appearance of scrupulous truthfulness, even when we have evidence from other sources that it is wholly misleading. Caesar has been called the greatest of the Roman historians. If this epithet is understood to imply careful research, critical weighing of evidence, profound reflections, or elaborate splendour of style, it is wholly out of place. But perhaps there is no Latin writer who strikes one so forcibly as knowing precisely what he meant to say, and saying it in a manner always perfectly adapted to his matter.

The same holds true of his Memoirs on the Civil War, although the work is apparently unfinished, and the text is often corrupt. It is natural that he should put everything in the best light for himself, but the skill with which this is done never makes us feel that we are reading a partisan narrative. In this case, however, the only instance where we may fairly doubt the truthfulness of the account is when he is narrating the siege of the Greek colony of Massilia.

The campaigns of Caesar, which were not included in his own memoirs, were described after his death by friends and partisans. Of these supplementary

works the eighth book of the Gallic War, and the book which describes the war at Alexandria after the death of Pompeius, were probably written by Aulus Hirtius. These are a close imitation of the style of Caesar, though without his freshness and vigour, and show that the author was a man of good education. But the campaigns in Africa and in Spain are narrated in a very different fashion. The account of the former is written in a turgid and grandiloquent but sometimes vulgar style; that of the latter, though less pretentious, is more ungrammatical, and wholly devoid of polish. It seems probable that these two books were written by subaltern officers who had taken part in these wars, and perhaps they were only intended as materials to be used by Hirtius if he had lived to finish his task.

3. Neither Caesar nor the other narrators of his wars treated history mainly as a branch of literature. They wrote, not to produce pleasing compositions, but to leave a record of important political events. But by this time the art of writing history was in other hands approaching maturity. The earlier Roman historians had been simply chroniclers. The first critical historian of Rome had been the Greek Polybius, who wrote about the middle of the second century B.C. The Latin writers were long in reaching anything like the same level. The earliest who attained any dignity of style and breadth of treatment was **L. Caelius Antipater** (about 120 B.C.); to him Livy seems to have been much indebted in his account of the war with Hannibal. A generation later **Q. Claudius Quadrigarius** wrote a history of Rome from its capture by the Gauls, which was much valued in later times for the simple freshness of his language, and which made some attempt at reflective-

ness. About the same time **Valerius of Antium** compiled a very lengthy history of Rome from its foundation, which abounded in all kinds of extravagant fictions. The archaic style was still predominant in the history of his own time by **L. Cornelius Sisenna**, an earlier contemporary of Cicero's, but along with this there was much slovenliness and incorrectness of diction. **C. Licinius Macer** in the same generation claimed to have treated the early history more critically than those who had gone before him, and to have used original authorities; but it is doubtful how far this claim was warranted, and Cicero, who disliked the man, speaks by no means favourably of his style. Hence we see that by the time of Cicero there was nothing holding high rank as historical literature in Latin. He was strongly tempted to fill the gap himself; and undoubtedly he had both the knowledge and the command of language which would have ensured him success, though we may well doubt whether he had the impartiality or the unbiassed love of truth. His friend **Cornelius Nepos** gained considerable credit by his historical works; but all that is now extant of them is a small selection of lives of famous generals. These do not give us a high idea of his powers. The style is clear and simple, but not elegant; the best authorities have not been employed, and there is little critical judgment. Perhaps what remains is only an abridgment of his work.

4. The first important Roman historian, therefore, whose works are preserved, at least in part, is **C. Sallustius Crispus**, commonly known as **Sallust** (86-35 B.C.) We know little of his early life, except that he was born among the Sabine hills at Amiternum, and that in 52 B.C. he became one of the

tribunes of the Commons. At this time he was an active member of the democratic party, and as he did his best to avenge the death of Clodius upon Milo, he was brought into collision with Cicero. Two years later he was expelled from the Senate on the alleged ground of his scandalous life. There is little reason to doubt that the charge was true, but just as little to doubt that political enmities were the real cause of his expulsion. In the civil war he joined Caesar, served him with activity, and was rewarded by the government of the kingdom of Numidia, now annexed to Rome under the name of New Africa. From his province he came back a man of great wealth; and for several years lived in much luxury at Rome. He is said to have married Terentia the divorced wife of Cicero, a lady some twenty years older than himself, who long survived him.

Sallust was the first who broke with the custom of writing history after the fashion of chronicles, and tried to give it breadth and unity of subject. He was thoroughly familiar with the Greek models, especially with Thucydides, whom he endeavoured especially to imitate, and the imitation is not always for his good. He has serious defects as a historian. He is not careful about the truth of his facts, nor is he clear in arranging them. The avoidance of the annalistic method sometimes leads him into blunders. He wishes to be philosophic, but his reflections are often trite, and as often ill supported. Like most ancient historians, he is fond of putting his own notions of the position of affairs into the form of speeches, ascribed to leading characters, without any evidence or even any likelihood that they are authentic. And the wish to explain as well as to narrate leads him to assign motives and to interpret

feelings far more fully than his evidence warrants. In fact, he treats his subjects rather as the materials for a historical drama than with the scrupulous accuracy of scientific history.

His style was all his own, and won for him much approval both in his own time and afterwards, though it was also severely criticised. It was largely a protest against the highly polished, flowing, and exuberant diction which Cicero's authority had rendered popular. That was scrupulously select in its language; Sallust used phrases and constructions borrowed sometimes from archaic writers, sometimes from the colloquial talk of his own time. That was copious almost to verbosity; Sallust aimed at a striking brevity, though this is often more apparent than real, and is produced as much by omission as by compression. That was flowing and harmonious; Sallust was jerky and abrupt. But his very defects were welcome to ears on which stately smoothness was beginning to pall; and with all his faults he was never dull or tedious. Hence his popularity and his influence on later writers were great.

The first of his writings seems to have been the brief history of the Conspiracy of Catilina, which broke out in Cicero's consulship in 63 B.C. It has been supposed that this was written to free the most respectable part of the democratic party, led by Caesar, from the charge of having taken part in the conspiracy; but there is little to support this view. It can only be said that while it paints in the darkest colours and probably greatly exaggerates the guilt of Catilina and his crew, it is hardly less severe in its condemnation of the vices and luxury of the nobles. Sallust himself had reached manhood when the conspiracy broke out, and was probably at Rome, so

that his account ought to carry the greatest weight; but his carelessness greatly diminishes its value. We would give all the rhetoric of his speeches, and all his moral reflections, for a few more definite facts narrated in their proper order.

The next episode which he undertook to describe was one for which he had doubtless collected materials in Africa, the war against Jugurtha, king of Numidia (112-106 B.C.) If he intended his historical writings to be satires upon the Roman nobles he could hardly have chosen a period in which their greed and incompetence were more conspicuous. The war was not really a serious one; nor was it one in the course of which the people first asserted themselves against the exclusive pride of the nobles, as Sallust says. But it was full of incident; and the outburst of popular feeling against the corrupt and worthless generals certainly shook the supremacy, which since the fall of the Gracchi seemed to have been established afresh. If from our present point of view there is much less information about the country of Numidia and its people than we might desire, there is yet a good deal to be learnt; and the campaigns are narrated with much life and vigour, though not with geographical or chronological accuracy.

There are fragments of a larger work, which Sallust is said to have written in five books, dealing with the reaction against the aristocratic constitution of Sulla from the death of the dictator in 78 B.C. to the year of Cicero's praetorship and the Manilian Law, 66 B.C. This would have been of great historical value if it had come down to us in a complete form.

CHAPTER III

POETS OF THE TIME OF CICERO

1. During this period the development of Latin prose outran that of poetry; and no great poet had appeared since the death of Ennius. But, shortly after Cicero's return from exile, a poem came into his hands, which he is said on fair authority to have edited and published, and which certainly he had read with interest. The writer was **T. Lucretius Carus,** the subject was *Nature* (*De Natura Rerum*), and the purpose was to expound, with all the charms of verse, the Epicurean doctrines as to the universe and man. Lucretius was a member of one of the oldest Roman houses, and seems to have been a man of wealth and leisure. But he had withdrawn from active life, and buried himself in study and meditation. He was deeply impressed with the problems of human life and with the social disorder of his time. In seeking for the causes of man's misery he found them to lie mainly in the terrors of the popular superstition, and in ignorance of the true limits of desire and ambition. For these he believed he had discovered the cure in the philosophy of Epicurus. This was based, in the first instance, on the atomic theories of Democritus, who had assigned the origin of the world to the "fortuitous concourse of atoms," resulting in what we should now call "the survival of the fittest," and so had done away with all need for the interference of the gods in the affairs of men, and all occasion for men to dread supernatural powers. On this basis Epicurus had built up his doctrine of a happy life,

consisting in a tranquil and virtuous state of calm, resembling as far as possible the careless ease of the gods. This theory Lucretius embraced with a passionate enthusiasm, and enforced with remarkable speculative energy and acuteness. But he was not only a philosopher; he was also a poet of original genius. It is this combination of gifts, coupled with his moral earnestness, which makes his six books *On Nature* the greatest philosophical poem of its kind in any language. Like all the writers of his time, he was a devoted student of Greek literature; and he set himself to gather from the stores of Greece all that would help him to recommend his doctrines by the beauty and the impressiveness of the form in which he stated them. But all this imported culture was absorbed into a mind already endowed with remarkable poetic powers. His language was fresh and vigorous, somewhat more archaic than that of his contemporaries, for he drew by preference from the earlier writers, but masterly in its command of pure native idiom. In this respect it often resembles that of Cicero in his poetry. Its charm is not derived from any happy selection or artistic suggestiveness, but rather from the fresh force with which a simplicity, sometimes passing into austerity, conveys to us his own vivid and strongly felt conceptions, so recalling to us Wordsworth at his best. He is not without art, but it is an art which is employed to set forth his thought impressively, and not to disguise its weakness in the beauty of its dress. If the thought is prosaic, there is nothing in the language to redeem it; and so there are long passages in his philosophical argument where the level hardly rises above prose, except for some conventional ornaments. But there are many places too where the strength of his feeling, the firm grasp

of his thought, the vivid freshness of his sense of the charms of nature and of the varied life of the world, transmute his language into that of the purest poetry. His metre and rhythm rarely leave the impression of artistic workmanship, but rather of one who used with natural power the resources of a splendid organ of expression, sometimes with roughness, often with monotony, but occasionally with magnificent effect. There are many noble lines; but there is rarely a continuous passage of any length wherein there is not something to jar upon an ear trained in the varied harmonies of Vergil. He asserts a claim to immortality on three grounds: first, for the greatness of his theme; secondly, for his high purpose of freeing the mind from the bondage of superstition; and, thirdly, for the clear brightness of his Muse's charm. But we cannot doubt that with him manner was of much less importance than the motive.

2. In the first book Lucretius lays down clearly his moving purpose. He paints a picture of men grovelling under the terrors of "religion," which lead them to such sacrifices as that of his daughter by Agamemnon, and declares that only a knowledge of nature can dispel this. His cardinal principle is that nothing can come from nothing, or pass into nothing; creation and destruction are alike impossible. All nature consists of body and void, the former being made up of absolutely solid and indestructible atoms; hence bodies cannot be broken up indefinitely, and a limit is set to waste. Here Lucretius digresses to examine rival theories of nature; and returning with an outburst of enthusiasm to his own, argues that atoms are infinite in number, space boundless, and the totality of matter therefore infinite. He rejects the theory of a centre to which all things tended, and

of a finite universe, surrounded by an infinite void. In the second book he carries out his atomic theory, explaining how the atoms are brought together by a slight *swerve* from a course originally directly downwards and parallel to that of others,—a swerve which Epicurus had devised to leave room for the possibility of so much free-will as the facts of life seemed imperatively to require. The atoms are of many different shapes, some smooth and small, others large and hooked or jagged, and the number of each shape is infinite; but they can only combine within definite limits, otherwise all kinds of monsters would arise. They are colourless, tasteless, scentless, and of course senseless, but they can form in combination sentient beings. This world is not the only one; there are in space other similar combinations of matter; all of which in time waste away and are broken up, even as this is already perishing. In the third book Lucretius argues that the soul is material, formed of the smallest and smoothest atoms, which are scattered at death, and are incapable of holding together when the body is destroyed. It is therefore impossible that there should be any sensation after death, or that men should have anything to fear. The fables of hell are really true of the victims of passion and vice in the present world. It is here perhaps that Lucretius rises to the highest point of moral pathos. In the fourth book he struggles with the immense difficulties which the facts of sensation and of mental conceptions present to his theory, and attempts to solve them by the Epicurean doctrine of "images" or films of inconceivable delicacy, always being cast off from the surfaces of things, a theory which also helps him to deal with dreams. In the fifth book he goes on to prove how the world is mortal; he describes

the nature of the gods, the formation of the various parts of the world, and the movements of the heavenly bodies; and then traces, in a manner which often recalls the theories of modern science, the gradual growth of vegetable and animal life, and the early history of mankind, with the origin of civilisation, of society, and of religion. His purpose throughout is to show that there is no need to assume any divine agency. The sixth book is more discursive, but deals with the explanation of the phenomena of nature which impressed men with a fear of the gods, such as thunder and lightning, storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, and pestilences. Probably this is unfinished, and indeed there are many traces in the poem that its composition had been interrupted and that it had not been finally revised. Even if it had received the poet's finishing touches, it could hardly have been brought into the unity of conception needed for a work of perfect art. The subject is too vast, and his manner of dealing with it too didactic for it to have a continuous interest. The powerful impression which it leaves upon the reader is due rather to the writer's lofty earnestness, and to his true sympathy with the life of nature and of man. Like all serious thinkers of the ancient world, he often shows a melancholy which is in touching contrast with the enthusiasm that inspires his prophetic work. He was never widely popular, but his poem was at once recognised as one of the greatest works of the time, and later poets like Vergil studied him with the closest care.

3. Lucretius stood apart from the current of contemporary literature; and drew his inspiration from the great Greek writers and thinkers, or from Ennius. But we have also the works of another poet, somewhat younger, but belonging to the same generation, who

represents, though with a genius all his own, the aims and the literary tastes of the school then fashionable. **C. Valerius Catullus** (84-54 B.C.) stands in sharp contrast with Lucretius, alike in temper and in genius. He was born at Verona in Cisalpine Gaul, a region not long brought within the Roman state; and although he bears an ancient Roman name, it may well be that there was at least some mixture of Keltic blood in him, while the culture, which had now been for generations familiar in the capital, must have come to his countrymen with the charm of freshness. His life was divided mainly between Rome, where he moved in the highest circles, and his native province. The most important fact in it for his poetry was his devotion to "Lesbia," undoubtedly to be identified with Clodia, the brilliant but infamous sister of the demagogue P. Clodius. Catullus was the first at Rome, of whom we have any remains, to throw into the form of lyric verse, borrowed from the early Greek poets, especially Alcaeus and Sappho, the varying passions of his own heart. The directness, simplicity, and force with which he expresses his personal emotions in verse, perfect alike in its grace and in its ease, give him rank among the very greatest of inspired singers. Although his love-poems are the most intense of his lyrics, they are by no means the whole of them. The most different incidents of his life furnish him with material. Many of his poems are satirical, sometimes virulent and coarse in the extreme. Others are suggested by his travels, his friendships, or his losses. But the note, never absent, is that of directness, finish, and force. Another group of his poems is of quite a different character. A noteworthy feature of the Roman culture at this time was the close study given to the poets who had flourished

at Alexandria some two centuries before. These poets were marked by great attention to precision of metre and regularity of construction, by ingenuity of language and by out-of-the-way learning. All these were points which had been lacking in the earlier school of Roman poetry; and so now there grew up a new school widely differing from the old one. Its centre was the "poets' guild" on the Aventine, of which the most active member, both as a teacher and composer, was **P. Valerius Cato,** himself from Cisalpine Gaul. Prominent among it were the poets Calvus and Cinna. To this school Catullus belonged, though his strong natural feeling and spontaneous genius raised him above its worst faults. His longer poems have often much superfluous ornament and misplaced learning; his faulty models lead him into pretty affectations, foreign to his natural tastes. But even here his real pictorial and artistic power comes out. The fashion at this time was to substitute for long and tedious epics brief and highly finished pictures of episodes or idylls (*epyllia*). Of this we have a specimen by Catullus in the "Marriage of Peleus and Thetis," which includes a long digression on the desertion of Ariadne by Theseus. There is little narrative in it, but much brilliant painting, given in aptly chosen poetic phrases. But perhaps the genius of Catullus reaches its height in the wonderful poem of "Attis." In this, with the greatest dramatic force and vividness of conception, aided by a rushing and tumultuous metre (known to English readers by the use that Lord Tennyson has made of it in his "Boadicea"), Catullus paints the frenzy and despair of a devotee of Cybele. Possibly he used Greek materials, but the strength and passion of the poem make it quite impossible to regard it as a mere transla-

tion. If there is any of his lyrics that deserves to be set beside this, it is one of a very different tone, in which with the daintiest grace and brightness he sings of the marriage of Manlius and Vinia.

Catullus died in his thirtieth year, an age at which Vergil and Horace had done nothing worthy to be set beside his greater achievements. Even as it is, some have ranked him first among the poets of Rome. If we are only to look to capacity, it would be hard to dispute this; but his early death robbed him of the opportunity of showing whether he could have concentrated his powers on a work of deep and enduring influence.

CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS

1. The establishment of the Empire marks a real epoch in Roman literature. For generations literature had been the occupation of a class, and had been little in contact with the national life. Now the position of this class was changed, and instead of living as the free and turbulent aristocracy of a republic, they were changed, first in substance and then in name too, into the courtiers of an Emperor. The sense of the greatness of the nation was not lost, and continued to inspire what was best in the national literature: but the activity of free political life had ceased; and more and more the interest of the cultivated classes came to be centred on the affairs of private life. Love-poetry took a prominence which would have been impossible when the duties of the citizen were

more thought of than the emotions of the individual. Oratory lost its most stirring themes, and sank into elaborate declamation: and even history was cramped in dealing with the affairs of the present, and turned rather to an artistic treatment of the past. In prose we have only to watch a steady decline, checked or disguised by one or two instances of writers of genius; and if verse has yet to reach its zenith of perfection, it is not long before that too follows on the downward course.

A.—AUGUSTAN POETS

2. **Vergil.**—Of all the Roman poets none is so truly representative of what was best in his age and country as Vergil; and at the same time none has had so deep influence on those who have written after him. It is possible that others had greater natural genius; and certainly others had humorous and dramatic powers which were denied to him, or which found no place in his writings. But none gathered up so completely all that could be gained from the culture of his time, and devoted it to such a noble purpose.

We have seen already the gradual steps by which the hexameter verse was adapted to the service of Latin poetry. We know nothing of the growth of this metre in Greece. The earliest specimens of it, which are preserved in the poems of Homer, appear at once in a perfection which was never exceeded afterwards. It was not possible that this perfection should have been attained by those who first attempted to write, or rather to sing, in hexameters. There must have been monotony, harshness, and clumsiness. But every trace of this is gone when we first hear "the

strong-winged music of Homer." In its combination of clearness, rapidity, simplicity, and nobleness it has never been surpassed, perhaps it has never been equalled, by any verse of any time or language. But when the Romans tried to imitate this, they had at first very little success. It was about two hundred years before any hexameters were written at Rome which could satisfy a refined taste and maintained through a long passage a high level of excellence. When Vergil, by dint of careful study, patient experiment, and rigid self-criticism, reached a type of verse really adapted to the Latin language, this was no longer the copious and flexible metre of Homer, but the "stateliest measure ever moulded by the lips of man."

3. **Publius Vergilius Maro** was the son of humble parents. His father had a small estate of his own in the district called Andes, near Mantua, on the river Mincius, in what was then called Cisalpine Gaul. There is some reason to believe that he was in part at least of Keltic stock. He was not born a Roman citizen, for his native region only enjoyed what were the lesser privileges of "Latin rights" until the poet was in his twenty-first year. The year of his birth was that of the famous consulship of Pompeius and Crassus in 70 B.C. The first twenty years of his life thus fall within the lull between the terrible civil wars of Marius and Sulla, and the struggle between Caesar and Pompeius, which was to have so much more lasting effects on the history of Rome and of the world. During his boyhood Julius Caesar was governing an extensive province in which Cisalpine Gaul was included; and in this district he was accustomed to spend his winters. The provincials here were devoted to his cause; and Vergil doubtless already

came under the spell of that great name and house, for the glory of which he did so much in his poems. Horace, we may notice, was born five years later, and Octavius, afterwards the Emperor Augustus, seven years later than Vergil: but his great minister Maecenas was probably about the same age. Of the brothers of the future poet, one died in boyhood; the other grew up to manhood, but died before Vergil. We hear nothing of any sisters. This may perhaps have tended to give him that shy and retiring character for which he was noted during life. When he was twelve years of age Vergil was taken by his father to Cremona, and in his sixteenth year he went on to the more advanced schools of Mediolanum (Milan), then the chief town of the province. But even with these his father was not content, and like the father of Horace, he took his son, after about two years, to study at Rome. The usual choice for an ambitious youth at this time lay between the profession of arms and the bar; for the former, Vergil's health was too weak; and he therefore devoted himself at first to the practice of rhetoric. But though he worked under the most famous teacher of the time, Epidius, he gave little promise of success as a pleader, and indeed his natural bashfulness and awkwardness of manner must have been serious obstacles. We may find, however, some traces of his training in the fine speeches of his *Aeneid*. But his taste was much greater for philosophy. He studied this under the Epicurean Siron, and for a long time, if not to the end, favoured the doctrines of this school.

We do not know how long he remained at Rome, nor how he spent his life from his twentieth to his eight-and-twentieth year. It seems most probable that he returned to his father's small estate near Mantua,

and there occupied himself with study and with attempts at poetry. There are four poems of some length, called *Moretum* (Salad), *Cupa* (Hostess), *Culex* (Gnat), and *Ciris*, and a collection of shorter poems, called by the Greek name *Catalepton*, which have been often supposed to have been written by Vergil at this time. The *Culex* and the *Ciris*, and two or three of the minor poems certainly cannot be his. As to the rest we have no positive evidence; some of them may well have been written by him. What is certain is that he studied very carefully the poems of Catullus and Lucretius which had recently appeared, and that he made himself thoroughly familiar with the great Greek poets; for the earliest of the works, which we know to be his, show the most minute knowledge of them. We are told also on good authority, and his own words bear out the statement, that he attempted, like earlier Roman poets, a poem on the history of Rome. But he soon learnt, what almost all true poets have come to learn, that long training and protracted thought and study are needed before one is able to handle worthily a great theme; and he gave up the attempt, only to resume it in another fashion, when his powers had been fully developed.

4. **Bucolic poetry.**—At this time no poetry was more studied at Rome than that of the *Alexandrian* school (Jebb's *Primer of Greek Literature*, Part III. ch. i.); and of this poetry that which was most attractive and original was the pastoral poetry of Theocritus. This consisted in *idylls*, or little pictures of life, mostly, though not always, dealing with the life of shepherds, and often put into a dramatic form. The first serious task to which Vergil set himself as a poet was to imitate these idylls of Theocritus. We have ten of his poems of pastoral life (*Bucolica*) pre-

served to us, amounting in all to about 700 lines. It is probable that these were not all that he wrote; indeed the name *Eclogae* (selections), by which they are often known, seems to point to this fact; but they were all which he thought successful enough to deserve to live; and it gives us at once a strong impression of Vergil's fastidious care in composition that he should be content to be known by no more than this small amount of verse until he was about thirty-three years of age.

In form and language the Eclogues were a close imitation of the Idylls of Theocritus; but there was a great difference in the substance of the poems. Theocritus, living at the court of a powerful king, in the wealthy and populous city of Alexandria, had made it his purpose to refresh the dwellers in the town with pictures of simple country scenes and incidents fresh with the breath of Nature. Of course there was artistic selection in his subjects, and something conventional in his treatment of them; but on the whole they were drawn from life, and true to their models. But before long the pastoral form came to be, even with his Greek successors, only the poetic setting in which the poet framed what he had to say about his own feelings and the events of his time. The shepherds and nymphs are but allegorical types, the use of which is intended only to give a certain suggestive charm. The truth to Nature which may still be found lies no longer in the faithful reproduction of incidents, but rather in the diffused sentiment of graceful tenderness, recalling that which a lover of the country derives from its sights and sounds. It is this second artificial kind of pastoral poetry which Vergil took up, and perfected so that he became the model for future writers. The dangers of this style of writing are

evident, and have come out plainly in many of his imitators, as for instance in much of the English verse of the eighteenth century. When the artificiality of form is not redeemed by fresh and genuine truth of feeling, idyllic poetry has nothing to save it from becoming a conventional sham, and therefore intensely wearisome. But with Vergil it was a revelation of a new kind of poetry, hitherto unknown in Rome. Its charm was fresh; the execution was perfect; and hence its success was immediate. We are told that the Eclogues were recited on the stage with great enthusiasm. They gave Vergil an entrance into the court of Augustus and the warm favour of Maecenas; and he took at once his place as the great poet of Nature and of rural life. Much of this success was doubtless due to the perfect structure of the verse. Vergil had done what at least five generations of poets had more or less failed in, and had brought out from the Latin language tones of luxurious melody never heard in it before. He was to reach still loftier notes when nobler themes awakened them; his style became afterwards more richly suggestive, more cunningly harmonious. But as a means for leaving on the mind the impression of the beauty of Nature in the lovely land of Italy the rhythm and diction of the Eclogues have never been surpassed.

5. **The Georgics.**—By the publication of the Eclogues Vergil won a foremost place among the men of letters whom the policy of Octavianus and Maecenas gathered at Rome. At this time Antonius was still in Egypt, claiming his share of the Roman world, and ten years more were to pass before the government could assume a settled form. But already those who had the rule of Italy were setting themselves to cure the evils which, partly from civil war and partly from

other causes, were sapping the strength of the state. No evil was more pressing than the general neglect of agriculture. Vergil had already shown how true a sense he had of the delights of country life; and how delicate a charm his musical verse could cast around it. It is therefore very probably true that Maecenas suggested to him the subject for his next great poem, the Georgics. At any rate, it is certain that the purpose of the poem was fully in harmony with the great minister's policy. But the subject was one to which Vergil was naturally drawn by his own tastes and studies; if it had not been so, he could not have assumed by order his impressive earnestness of tone and depth of sympathy. He had already given to his countrymen what could be transplanted of the Greek bucolic poetry. Now he turned to another school, founded, some eight centuries before, by Hesiod of Boeotia, and revived, with important differences, by Alexandrian poets. The aim of *didactic* poetry had been to give useful instruction, made attractive by the embellishments of verse. The danger to which it was then and has ever since been liable was that the teaching should be trivial and commonplace, and the subject incapable of arousing the strong emotion which can alone justify the use of poetic ornament. The practical importance of the work of the farmer and Vergil's thorough knowledge of it saved him from the first peril; his own true love of the country, his strong natural piety, and his poetic sense preserved him from the latter. Hence he attained a success, rarely if ever equalled, in throwing a poetic colour over a theme that might seem prosaic.

In the first book he treats of the cultivation of corn, but spends much space in dwelling upon the signs of fair and foul weather, and ends with a

splendid description of the eclipse which foretold the death of Caesar, and the evils of his time which still called for a Caesar to repress them. The second book deals with trees and especially the vine, and with the nature of various soils. It contains a magnificent digression on the glories of Italy, and closes with a picture of the happy life of the husbandman, as compared with the curse that attends upon ambition and luxury. In the third book Vergil treats of the breeding of cattle and horses. The subject is less poetical in itself, and is relieved by descriptions of a chariot-race, of the effects of love upon men and animals, of a northern winter, and of a pestilence that fell upon cattle. The fourth book deals with bee-keeping, a subject of more importance in the ancient world, when sugar was all but unknown, than it is at present. But this book would have been much shorter than any of the others if Vergil had not brought in the story of Aristaeus, inweaving a long episode on the loss of Eurydice by Orpheus. We learn on good authority that this was due to a recasting of the poem in a second edition. At first it had closed with a passage in honour of Vergil's friend Gallus, to whom he seems to have been warmly attached. But when, some four years after the publication of the Georgics, Gallus fell into disfavour with Augustus and committed suicide, this passage was removed, and the story of Orpheus somewhat incongruously put in its place.

If we turn now to consider the distinctive merits of the Georgics, the first place must be given to the exquisite perfection of the diction and metre. The poem was read to Augustus and Maecenas on their return from the East in 29 B.C., and there are passages in it which cannot have been written earlier. But it

was begun at least seven years before; that is to say, it was produced at the average rate of about one line a day. We cannot wonder that the finish of it is perfect. Vergil's culture had grown both richer and deeper since he wrote the Eclogues. But what gives him his unique position is that his learning, both in Greek and in Latin literature, never crushed his originality or dulled his taste. He borrowed largely; but everything that he borrowed he made his own by the added beauty which he gave to it. We may note next the seriousness of his purpose. He is able to work upon our imagination and our emotions, because his own feelings have been deeply stirred. The struggles of man with the forces of Nature have a pathetic interest for him, because he regards them as the means appointed by the Father Himself for the moral training of the human race. The digressions which he allows himself are not mere embellishments; they serve to bring out the lessons which are suggested by his theme. Then again we cannot miss the effect of his earnest patriotism. He is not yet the poet of the greatness of Rome; but he is possessed with a love for Italy. Besides the more formal eulogy which has already been mentioned, there are countless touches from which we see how he loved to dwell upon the varied beauties of his native land. The virtues too, to which he delights to refer, are just those which marked the simple, earnest, pious, diligent yeomen of the olden time, in his days growing more rare, but still to be found in many a country home. The Georgics is a poem limited in its range, but achieving all at which it aims with rare perfection of success. But more remained to be attempted.

6. **The Aeneid.**—Augustus had now overthrown his only rival, and had returned to Rome to establish

the state anew on foundations that might give hopes of lasting peace. It was his aim not only to settle the constitution but also to reform the morals and religion of the commonwealth. For this other forces than those of arms and of statecraft were needed; and he claimed the services of the two leading poets of the time to do their part in the work. Possibly he would have liked a more direct celebration of his deeds in war and peace than Vergil and Horace felt to be allowed by their art. But neither declined the appeal. What Vergil did was something as yet untried in literature. Hitherto epic poems had been of one of two kinds. Either the poet had selected some theme from the past, and treated it merely for the sake of the interest of its own incidents, finding its permanent value only in the unchanging emotions of humanity: or, if he wished it to have more direct reference to the present, he had chosen his subject from events within recent memory, and had tried, usually with indifferent success, to dignify it by his manner of treatment. Vergil takes a passage of legendary history, not so much for its own sake as for that which it symbolises and suggests. His true subject is the growth of the greatness of Rome, and the care of Heaven for her welfare through all her perils and sufferings, until she found her haven of peace and prosperity under the Julian house. The wanderings of Aeneas are of little interest, except so far as they furnish an instance whereby this can be set forth in concrete, picturesque, and therefore poetical form, admitting also of many a glimpse into the history of the past under the impressive form of prophecy. It is only in this sense that the Aeneid can be regarded as "written to order." Vergil doubtless knew, and Augustus himself knew, that he was

carrying out the wishes of the Emperor; but he was carrying them out in his own way. And there is not the least reason to doubt that he was faithful to his own convictions, as well as to his art in doing so. His own mind was thrilled with the sense of the majesty of Rome and the glory of her world-wide empire. His profoundly religious spirit was imbued with the sense that this was due to a divine Destiny, greater even than the gods, before which men must bow, if they are not to be broken by it. And like many of the best men of his time he saw in the practical sagacity and capacity for rule of Augustus the providential means of securing the peace and order for which the world was longing.

7. The legend of the foundation of Rome by an Alban prince descended from the immigrant Trojan Aeneas is one without any historical evidence or probability. We can still trace to some extent its growth and variations. But by degrees it had come to be generally accepted in a form not unlike that to which Vergil gave definite shape and authority. Its very vagueness made it the more possible for him to put into it the meaning which he wished it to bear. It was familiar to his readers, so far as to save him from the need of any formal preface to it, but not so fixed as to fetter his creative imagination both in details and in characters.

In close imitation of the unconscious art of Homer, Vergil does not begin his story of the wanderings of Aeneas with the fall of Troy. The poem opens with a picture of the prince and his company, with their voyages nearly over and almost in sight of their goal in Italy. A storm sent upon them by the malice of Juno scatters their fleet, and wrecks it on the Libyan shores, where the walls of the newly founded

Carthage were just rising. The Tyrian queen Dido receives them with kindly welcome; and the second and third books of the poem are taken up with the recital which, at her request, Aeneas gives of the capture and ruin of Troy and of their wanderings over the sea during the seven years that followed. The fourth book describes the love that sprang up between Aeneas and Dido; his desertion of her at the bidding of the gods; her despair and suicide. The fifth book, partly as a relief between the tragedy of the fourth and the mysterious majesty of the sixth, and partly in order to give Vergil an opportunity of imitating some famous passages in Homer, is devoted to an account of the funeral games held by the Trojans in Sicily in honour of Anchises, father of Aeneas. The boat-race, the foot-race, the boxing-match, the shooting-match, and the evolutions of the mounted youths, all are told with vigour and spirit: and the book ends with the miraculous preservation of the fleet from destruction by fire, the start afresh for Italy, and the drowning of the chief pilot Palinurus.

The sixth book is that in which Vergil is admitted to be at once most rich and most independent. He gathers up the fruit of all his study of legend, of history, and of philosophy into the vision of the other world and of the future life; and here his debt to Homer is but little, except for the suggestion of the visit that his hero pays to the under-regions. Aeneas and his followers have hardly reached the shores of Italy when, at the bidding of the Sibyl of Cumae, he descends by the aid of a mystic golden branch into the realms of Dis. Here he sees many a weird vision, visits the abode of disembodied spirits, sees from afar the place of torment of the wicked, and moves over the Elysian plains whereon the blessed

dwell. With some inconsistency with his views elsewhere, Vergil here brings in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, and of their purifying sufferings. Then, guided by his father's spirit, Aeneas is led into the midst of the spirits that are afterwards to be clothed in the bodies of the chiefs of Alba and the heroes of Rome, thus giving the poet occasion for a magnificent series of prophecies of the great deeds in her history. In the seventh book there is an account of the arrival of Aeneas at the Tiber; his kindly reception by King Latinus, and the foundation of his new city. But the peace is disturbed by the restless hate of Juno, who sends the fury Allecto to stir up war. She rouses to frenzy the queen Amata, who fires the Latin women to an outbreak, and the Rutulian prince Turnus, the rejected suitor of the princess Lavinia, whose hand is now promised to Aeneas. A broil arises between the Trojans and the Latins, and the Italian clans are gathered to make war upon the strangers. Here Vergil's wide knowledge and his love for Italy find free play in the long catalogue of the allies of Turnus.

In the eighth book Aeneas, at the bidding of the god of Tiber, seeks the help of the Arcadian king Evander, who had built a town on the hill which was afterwards the earliest and central stronghold of Rome. The contrast between his humble settlement and the glories of the world's great capital gives occasion for some of Vergil's finest verse, and many an old legend, especially that of the victory of Hercules over Cacus, is inwoven in the story. Evander promises help under his gallant son Pallas; and Venus prevails on Vulcan to forge armour for Aeneas. The sculptures on the shield are described at length, and recall the most famous events in Roman history, ending with

the victory of Actium, and the praises of Augustus. So skilfully does Vergil again avail himself of the chance to enrich his national epic with pictures alike of the ancient and of the present glory of Rome.

The books which follow are largely taken up with battle scenes, and here Vergil is confessedly more imitative and less real, and therefore less successful. He has none of the keen delight in war which Homer felt in his very different surroundings, and such interest as he took seems due rather to his patriotic love for the old martial spirit of the Italian races. But he is at his best in the pathetic touch with which he handles the death of some of his leading characters.

In the ninth book the story of the attack by Turnus on the Trojan camp finds welcome relief in the moving account of the gallant enterprise and the death of the devoted pair Nisus and Euryalus, and the lament of the mother of the younger hero. In the same way in the tenth book, with its council of the Olympian gods, the return of Aeneas, his slaughter of the Latins, and the flight of Turnus, the chief interest is found in the episodes of the death of Pallas at the hands of Turnus, and of the not less brave young Lausus, who is killed by Aeneas when endeavouring to protect his wounded father, Mezentius the cruel Etruscan tyrant. In the eleventh book, after a pathetic account of the funeral of Pallas, and debates in the council of Latinus, where Vergil's rhetorical power again finds exercise, the central figure becomes the Volscian maiden-warrior Camilla, who after many a deed of valour is shot by an Etruscan archer. The twelfth is occupied with the challenge of Turnus to Aeneas to decide the struggle by single combat, the rupture of the truce by the final effort of Juno, the wound and the miraculous

cure of Aeneas, and the combat between the two chieftains ending with the death of Turnus.

More than ten years seem to have been spent upon the composition of the Aeneid, but it was still unfinished, in the poet's judgment, when he left Italy in the year 19 B.C. for a short visit to Greece, from which he returned only to die. He left instructions in his will that his friends were to destroy the poem; but Augustus wisely forbade them to do so, and ordered that it should be published just as he had left it.

8. It is not too much to say that for centuries, especially during the Middle Ages, the Aeneid was accounted the greatest work of human genius; and probably no poem has been so widely known and studied, at least in the Western world, ever since the Christian era. But during the present century it has often been roughly criticised. It is not only that there are many imperfections which might have been removed by revision. Critics have thought it wanting in originality; it has been said that Vergil's tender and pensive genius was not competent to undertake a great poem of action; his imagination was less vivid and his pictures of life less real than those of Homer, and his thoughts less profound, his views of life less impressive than those of the great Greek tragedians. Especially it is said that his power of creating and of embodying varied and striking characters is but small. Much of this must be granted, enough to remove Vergil from the very front rank of the world's poets, side by side with Homer and Shakspere. But there is enough charm and power left to place him high in the second class. He is not original; but he does not desire to be: his aim is rather to gather up all that was richest and

best in the culture of the past, and to hand it on in the most finished and perfect form. He does not delight in stirring adventure for its own sake; he lived in days when the fresh delight in battle and in the marvels of travel was no longer possible. But the wanderings and the combats which he describes take their place as part of a great episode of divinely ordered history. If he dwells less upon the problems of the lives of men and women, he is filled with the conception of the life of a mighty nation. And if his characters are less vividly human, it is, in part at least, because he treats them all as subordinate to the will of Destiny. As an artist in words he stands supreme. Coleridge once said, "If you take from Vergil his diction and metre, what do you leave him?" One might almost as well say, "If you take from a great painter his drawing and his colouring, what is left?" He used the Latin language with a skill which no earlier writer had equalled, except occasionally, and as it were by accident; and which later writers could only do their best to imitate. His style is enriched with the happiest reminiscences, and at the same time fresh with bold experiments; weighty with condensed force, and pathetic in its reserved simplicity. The music of his verse is cloying in its varied harmony, and majestic in its stately flow. Other writers reached great excellence on different lines; but the best of which the Latin language was capable, was shown once and for ever by Vergil.

9. **Horace.**—The name which naturally goes with that of Vergil is the name of his friend and fellow-worker Horace (**Quintus Horatius Flaccus**). Both belonged to the circle which Augustus and his minister Maecenas gathered around them; and their literary and political aims were the same, though the

paths which they followed were in some ways different. In poetry their common purpose, shared with others whose names, but not their works, have come down to us, was to bring into Latin literature the accuracy, taste, and finish of the best Greek models. In politics they agreed in their desire to aid in the moral and religious reforms of Augustus by casting round his rule the charm of letters, and indirectly and therefore the more effectively to teach the lessons which he desired that his countrymen should learn. Vergil seems to have been ready from the first to accept the new order of things; Horace came over to it from the camp of its opponents. Of Vergil's life we learn hardly anything from his poems; Horace is known to us from his works, as very few ancient writers are, and almost all that we can gather about the outward facts of his history, as well as his tastes feelings, and ideas, comes to us from this source.

He was five years younger than Vergil, having been born at Venusia, on the borders of Lucania and Apulia, in 65 B.C. His father had been a slave, probably of the township of Venusia, but was freed before his son's birth, and had made money enough as a "collector" to purchase a small farm. Horace seems to have been an only child, and we hear nothing of his mother; but his father brought him up with the greatest care, and was plainly a man of practical wisdom and of high character. He took him early to Rome that he might have the best of teaching, and shortly before the murder of Caesar sent him to Athens to improve his knowledge of Greek and to study philosophy. When Brutus came to the East, Horace along with others of the young Romans then at Athens joined him, and fought as military tribune, but without distinction, at Philippi.

On his return to Rome he found his small estate confiscated, but managed somehow to get a clerkship in the treasury. Then he turned to writing, and at first tried to make a name for himself by scurrilous verse, some of which—though probably only a very small part—still remains to show how badly even Horace could write. But he must have attempted worthier subjects also; for some three years later he was introduced to Maecenas by Vergil and his poet-friend Varius, and after some delay admitted into his circle. The glimpses which Horace often gives of his relations with his patron show that he must have been one of the most delightful of companions, and perhaps it was to his social qualities rather than his literary powers that he owed his first successes.

10. **Satires.**—The earliest published work of Horace (35 B.C.) was the first book of Satires. The term "satire" had not yet got the meaning which it now has, and these writings were less "satiric" than those of Lucilius in the previous century Some, like the 5th, the 7th, the 8th, and the 9th, are humorous narratives; the 6th is mainly a sketch of his education and his way of living, a defence against those who censured him as unworthy of the friendship of Maecenas, interesting to us mainly from the charming picture which he gives of his father; in the 4th he defends his satires from the charge of malevolence, and in the 10th he criticises the style of Lucilius; the 2d and the 3d are of a more directly satiric character, for in the former, with much coarseness of treatment, he attacks the way in which men avoiding one extreme of vice run into the other, and in the latter he preaches charity by showing how all have their own faults; while in the 1st, probably the latest written, he attacks the common faults of dis-

content and avarice. The main reason of the altered tone is probably to be found in Horace's own position. He was "steeped" in Lucilius; so that some have even spoken of his satires as little more than "restorations" of Lucilius, adapted to the taste of his own time. But while Lucilius was a wealthy knight, moving as an equal in the highest circles, and attacking the most eminent men with perfect freedom, Horace had his own way to make; political satire was impossible to him, and even social satire was dangerous. With all his tact, he seems to have given offence to not a few. Hence he was acting wisely, as well as in harmony with his own feelings, in avoiding personal attacks on living men. What he did was to show for the first time how the hexameter verse, which had hitherto been rough and harsh in Lucilius, or stately and somewhat ponderous in Lucretius, could be used with ease and grace for what was in his own language "talk" (*sermo*) rather than poetry. The style of Horace in his satires often reminds us of that of Terence, with the added charm of a more varied and artistic metre.

Not long after the publication of this book of Satires, Maecenas presented Horace with his much loved Sabine estate among the hills, some twenty-five miles from Rome, and about eight from the favourite resort of Tibur. This gave him an assured though modest competence, and a welcome retreat from the bustle of Rome; and there are many traces in his later writings of the delight that he found in it.

The second book of Satires followed some six years later (29 B.C.) In it he departs still further from the Lucilian type, and comes more close to the dramatic form, which had been the earlier one. All the eight satires are either descriptions of scenes or

conversations. They show a more genial philosophy, with even increased keenness of observation, and a more assured sense of his personal position, with fewer traces of bitterness. There is also a greater finish and ease of style.

11. **Odes.**—Probably it was in the preceding year (30 B.C.) that Horace published his first attempts at lyric verse, under the name of *Epodes*. These are of no great literary value; it is doubtful whether they showed any advance on the imitations of Archilochus already produced by Catullus and his friend Calvus; the lampoons are coarse without being effective, and the more serious pieces less fresh and vivid than those of Catullus, while there is no marked superiority in metrical skill. But they are of interest as showing Horace already aiming at distinction in a field far removed from that in which he had hitherto been working, and probably setting himself here in direct opposition to the fashionable tastes of the time, and also as proving plainly the serious and elevated interest which he took in public affairs. Some of the Odes were possibly written before this time, but the first three books as we have them now, were mainly the product of the years 30-24 B.C. The fact that Horace did not take to lyric poetry until he was about thirty-five years of age, throws much light upon the nature of his verse. It was no irresistible outburst of genius which found its vent in his song. He set himself rather to gain ripeness of thought and matured powers of expression before he attempted any lofty flight. Very probably he was wise enough to destroy many an imperfect ode; and it is certain that of those which remain some are to be regarded mainly as experiments in metre and diction, for which Greek originals supplied not only the model but the

substance. So he learnt by degrees a quite unique command over the lyric metres, and mastered an art that perished with him. "Of our lyric poets," says Quintilian, "Horace is the only one worth reading," and if we except Catullus, the judgment has been universally approved. The form of his poems is adapted with exquisite skill to their general tone; the diction is unerring in its rightness; there is subtlety without obscurity; stateliness without bombast; terseness and directness without abruptness and baldness. Of all the classic poetry of the world, there is none in which it is so impossible without loss to alter or displace a word as in the *Odes* of Horace. But there is much more than beauty of form and language in them. Taking them as a whole, there is serious purpose, width of view, patriotic aspiration. Horace has accepted the new constitution of the state, and makes it his business to set forth the peace, the prosperity, and the moral regeneration that are to come with it. There are still dangers from without and from within, but the good care of the gods and the wisdom and valour of Augustus may be trusted to avert them. For the private man the secret of happiness lies in a quiet self-command, not blind to the facts of life, but accepting contentedly the joys which the present can give. His philosophy is that of Epicurus, but elevated partly by the strong Roman sense of the nobleness of the active virtues, partly by a touch of stoicism which seems to have impressed itself more upon him with advancing years. "In lyric poetry," says Professor Nettleship, "Horace represents, as Vergil does in epic, the highest ideas which the national life of the Roman Empire was capable of inspiring." There is much which is a lighter strain. The fashion of the time has doubtless to answer for

most of his love-poetry, which rarely has a touch of genuine passion, and is generally either the pure play of the fancy around fictitious characters, or the artistic reminiscence of past emotions, never very deep or strong. The poems addressed to his friends show a much more attractive side of his nature; his kindly good-nature, gentle humour and delicate courtesy which made him one of the most delightful of companions, come out well in these genial lyrics. It is these especially which have given Horace his place among the best loved of Latin poets.

The three books of Odes are not arranged in any chronological order, and it is not often easy to date the various poems. But the first nine of the first book are all in different metres, and include a specimen of each of his more important measures. This cannot be an accident. Nor is it by accident that the first six odes of the third book all deal, in the same metre and with great elevation of style, with national themes; they form indeed but strophes of one great chant in honour of Augustus and his policy. The first ode of the first book is manifestly an introduction to the whole, as the last in the third book is a farewell to lyric poetry, in which Horace declares that his work is finished and his triumph won. But the rest seem to be arranged on no principle, except that of giving variety by a frequent change of key.

12. After the publication of these books of odes, Horace appears to have felt that he had said all that he cared to say in poetry. His genius was never fluent; and he had now shown how the Greek lyrists could be reproduced in Latin, and their forms of expression turned to worthy purpose. For the future he intended to be a student of philosophy and

only a critic of poetry. There is some reason for believing that the first writing in which he returned to a subject, which he had already touched in more than one of his satires, was the *Epistle to the Pisos*, commonly called the *Art of Poetry*. This is mainly concerned with the drama; and it appears to have been a free adaptation of a Greek treatise with Latin illustrations and running criticisms. Its main lines are somewhat confused, and the details far from clear; the criticism is sober and sensible, but not profound; its chief interest lies in the insight which it gives us into the principles which the school to which Horace belonged would have followed in writing tragedy; and as no tragedies of this time have come down to us, we cannot test them by their actual success. It shows further a mastery over easy hexameter verse used for literary criticism, a purpose to which the same metre had been applied with far less success by Lucilius.

13. **Epistles.**—It was probably about four years after the publication of the first three books of the Odes that Horace broke new ground by the issue of the first book of the *Epistles*. He speaks of these, like the Satires, as not being poetry; but they are less prosaic in tone than the Satires, and at the same time full of a mellower wisdom. They contain much genial criticism of life, many maxims of practical philosophy in terse and striking form. To many they have appeared, not the most elevated, but the most delightful products of Latin poetry. Certainly if the age of Augustus is better known to us than any period in the history of modern Europe until recent times, this is largely due to the lifelike faithfulness of Horace's pictures of society. In employing epistles as a form of literary composition, Horace was only following the

example of earlier writers, now lost; but there is no reason to think that any of his predecessors reached anything like the same easy grace and finish, and certainly none of his successors so completely avoided the danger of strained epigram and contorted rhetoric.

The first book of the Epistles had been issued while Augustus was away from Rome on a three years' visit to the East, or at latest immediately after his return; and it is possible that even the collected Odes had not been known to him before this time. But now his personal relations became closer with the poet, who by the death of Vergil in this year (19 B.C.) was left an unchallenged supremacy. The official recognition of Horace's position was given when he was called upon to write (in 17 B.C.) the ode to be chanted at the great *ludi saeculares*, celebrated at intervals of a century or more to praise the gods for the continued preservation of the state. It was hardly less as an official duty that he undertook in 15 B.C. to celebrate in an elaborate ode the victories gained by the stepsons of the emperor over the mountain tribes of Tyrol and the Grisons, and in three others the glories of Augustus in war and peace. With these he issued ten more of slighter character, perhaps to disguise the political purpose of the others, as a fourth book of Odes. Then he finally laid aside his lyre. But Augustus complained, we are told—though we may believe he was half in jest—that Horace had addressed none of his poems directly to him, and so "extorted" from him a long epistle, mainly of literary criticism. In publishing this, probably in 13 B.C., he added to it another, also of some length, which he had written five or six years before, addressed to Florus, and so made up a second book of Epistles. Of the rest of his life we know nothing, except that he died in

8 B.C., only surviving by a few months his friend and patron Maecenas. His writings, like those of Vergil, even in his lifetime, were studied in schools, and known through the length and breadth of the Empire; but in one respect his fate was very different from that of Vergil. The latter left his mark deep upon the later literature, on prose hardly less than on poetry, and all subsequent writers of epics trod closely in his footsteps. Horace was felt to be inimitable; and the satirist who, a century later, shows the closest study of his language is far enough from catching his style or spirit. "The moulds in which Horace cast his lyrical and his satirical thoughts were broken at his death" (Munro).

14. **Elegiac poets.**—The wish of Augustus was to regenerate society; but the necessary result of his policy was to hasten its decline. Outward decency and respect for religion could be encouraged and even enforced; but as all avenues to a free and manly public activity were closed, the love of pleasure came more and more to fill the mind of the Roman citizen. So the poetry which was most in favour during the latter part of his reign was that of personal emotion and sentiment. For this the Greeks had devised the Elegy (Jebb's *Primer*, p. 50) as the natural expression. It took its rise in the cultivated and luxurious cities of Ionia, found little favour in the great days of Attic poetry, but was cultivated again among the learned circles of Alexandria, mainly as a vehicle for pensive love-poetry. Some of the Alexandrine elegies had already been translated and imitated by Catullus, but these are among the least attractive of his poems. Now in the following generation elegiac verse was taken up again by a school of poets, the chief extant representatives of which are Tibullus, Propertius,

and Ovid. Of the earliest of them, Cornelius Gallus the friend of Vergil, nothing survives.

15. **Albius Tibullus** was some ten years younger than Horace, and died in the same year as Vergil. It is possible, but by no means certain, that he is the Albius to whom Horace addresses Odes i. 33 and Epist. i. 4. He inherited a good estate, but lost much of it in the confiscations of 41 B.C. His chief patron and friend was M. Valerius Messala, one of the most distinguished generals and orators of the time of Augustus; with him he served in one campaign in Gaul, and distinguished himself. But he hated war, and spent the last ten years of his short life mainly in retirement in the country. Four books of elegies are extant under his name; the first is devoted to his love for Delia; the second to that for Nemesis, both of these being, according to the practice of the time, fictitious names. The third and fourth books are undoubtedly spurious; they seem to be a collection of poems of various authorship, written by members of the circle of Messala, and gathered as a kind of appendix to the poems of Tibullus. The most interesting of them are the brief love-letters of Sulpicia to Cerinthus, the only love-poetry by a Roman woman which has come down to us. The rest are of poor quality. The genuine poems of Tibullus are marked by much delicacy and refinement of feeling and of language. The style is clear and simple; and the substance gives us a pleasing impression of a gentle, pensive, and unselfish nature. Quintilian not unjustly regards him as the most polished and elegant of the Roman elegiac poets.

16. **Sextus Propertius,** who comes next to him, is a striking contrast. If Tibullus is one of the easiest, Propertius is one of the most difficult of

Roman writers. He was probably some fifteen years younger than Horace, and like so many others was reduced to poverty by the confiscations; but he received a good education by the care of a mother to whom he was warmly attached, and his poems give abundant, indeed excessive proof of his varied learning. Like Horace he was patronised by Maecenas, but his temper and character were not attractive; and it is a plausible conjecture that Horace has at least one caustic reference to him, although he can hardly be, as some have thought, the "bore" of one of his sharpest satires. The chief event in his life was his attachment to "Cynthia," which lasted, not without interruptions, for some six years (28-23 B.C.) The first book of his elegies, published about 25 B.C., is almost wholly addressed to Cynthia, or concerned with his love for her; and gave him at once a high position as "the Roman Callimachus." The date and even the division of his other books is doubtful; but two or, according to some critics, three books were published during the poet's lifetime, and a fourth (or fifth) posthumously, perhaps about 15 B.C. It has been said that his Muse sank into silence with his love; and certainly the last poem which he published himself is one in which he speaks of his passion as past, and this cannot have been later than 23 B.C. One of the poems of the last book seems to point to a reconciliation before the death of Cynthia, and another deals with an incident of the time of their attachment. But the rest handle subjects taken from legend or history, and strike a loftier note. We may conjecture that Propertius had formed the intention of writing a series of poems on the annals of his country, either in early life, or after his amour had been broken off; what points rather to the former

conclusion is the fact that the only two poems which can be proved to be as late as 16 B.C. were written for special occasions and at the request of others. But this is mere guess-work; and one would rather believe that the weak health from which he suffered interrupted his design and carried him off before it was completed, than that he dropped it under the impulse of personal passion. What is certain is that we know nothing of his life after his thirty-fifth year, and that there is no reason to believe that he long survived it.

The genius of Propertius was unique. In him great powers are accompanied by striking faults. His style is vague, indirect, cumbrous, and sometimes barely Latin: his thought is often strained and exaggerated; his references far-fetched and obscure. But the same qualities, which at times lead to these defects, at others give a freshness and vigour to his language. His imagination is strong and his conceptions vivid. His strongly emotional nature is able to impress us alike with a sympathetic sense of his somewhat melancholy delight in beauty, and with the overmastering force of his sensuous passion.

Horace made it his business to preach to his younger contemporaries the need of self-criticism and finish; none of them can have needed the lesson more, or taken it less to heart than Propertius. Wherever he is great, he is so by the impetuous force of his genius, and he is rarely at his best for long.

17. Again we have a sharp contrast when we pass on to the third of this group, Ovid (**Publius Ovidius Naso**), the most facile, ingenious, and rhetorical of the elegiac poets. The year of his birth was that of the death of Cicero (43 B.C.), so that he grew up with no knowledge of a free republic and the healthy

influences of public life. Like all the distinguished writers of this time he was from one of the country districts, having been born at Sulmo among the hills of central Italy. He came to Rome to study law and oratory, but soon showed remarkable gifts for verse-writing, and did not care to pursue an official career. He was married early, but was soon divorced, and a second marriage did not last much longer, though a third seems to have been happy. His earliest poems were love-elegies (*Amores*), the subject of which passed under the fictitious name of Corinna, and was one of the class of freedwomen, like the Cynthia of Propertius. These were published at first in five books, when he was still very young, and were at a later time gathered into three, as we have them at present. They are marked by complete frivolity of tone; there is not even any true warmth of passion; still less is there any sense of the unworthiness of a life of mere sensual pleasure, without even a redeeming touch of constancy. But their immoral tendency was no hindrance to their acceptance with the fashionable society of the time, and Ovid was at once raised to the position of their favourite poet, and ranked as fourth along with Gallus, Tibullus, and Propertius. About the same time he wrote a series of *Epistles of Heroines*. Twenty-one of these are current under his name; but the last six, which include three answers of the lovers, are rejected by all scholars, and even the fourteenth is of doubtful genuineness. In later times these have been perhaps the most popular of his works, and not unnaturally. The theme is the attractive one of unfortunate love, and there is abundant room for his genuine dramatic power and his fertile rhetoric. He shows too here his full command over elegiac verse in its most graceful,

polished, and flowing form. Not long after, he issued in three books what has been called "the most demoralising work ever written, at least in ancient times, by a man of genius." His *Ars Amandi* is a handbook of seduction, written in a strain of absolute heartlessness, and all the more repulsive from its ingenuity. The first two books are addressed to men, the last to women, to teach them how to retain their conquests. The pendant to this work, the Remedy of Love, is not less immoral in substance, and is even coarser in tone. The date of these works may be placed about 2 B.C., when Ovid was forty years of age. During the next ten years he turned to worthier work. The first subject that he attempted was one well fitted to his ingenuity and to his skill in brilliant narrative. Under the title of *Metamorphoses* he told in fifteen books the legends which included some tale of transformation, most of them the love-adventures of the gods. In this work he brings out new powers from the hexameter verse, not reproducing the stateliness and exquisite music of Vergil, but giving it a lively animated flow, suited to the romantic nature of his stories. The material is mainly borrowed from Greek, but Ovid shows great skill in his graphic details, in managing his transitions, and in the telling speeches which he is fond of introducing. Yet there is no elevation of purpose nor unity of conception, binding the work into one great whole. It loses nothing by being read piecemeal, and is a collection of stories, not an epic poem. It had not received the author's latest revision when his great calamity befell him ; and he burnt his own manuscript, although there were other copies, as he was probably well aware, to keep the work from perishing.

During the same years Ovid was engaged upon

another poem in elegiac verse, bearing the name of *Fasti*. Like the Metamorphoses, this was to contain a number of isolated narratives bound together by a merely external link; for it was a poetical handling of the Roman Calendar. One book was assigned to each month; and the festivals and other anniversaries were described in order, the events which each day commemorated being severally narrated. It was thus intended to be a national poem, but the absence of serious purpose deprives it of all claim to greatness. The legends and history of Rome are treated in a spirit of antiquarian curiosity, without deep religious or patriotic feeling. Six books only were completed, the first of which is preserved to us in a second re-written edition. These are of interest as giving us many references to rites and customs not elsewhere mentioned; but the work as a whole adds nothing to our conception of Ovid's powers, though it shows them at times at their best.

18. So far Ovid's life had been one of uninterrupted good fortune. But in 8 A.D., like a bolt out of the blue, came the Emperor's sentence of banishment to the distant and wretched town of Tomi, near the mouths of the Danube. The reasons for this crushing blow cannot be assigned with certainty: Ovid often refers to them, but always in guarded and obscure language. The offence alleged was the publication of the Art of Love, but this had been issued for at least ten years, and the writing of it can only have been the pretext. It is highly probable that he was at least privy to the licentious intrigues of the Emperor's grand-daughter, the younger Julia, which were detected just at this time; and that Augustus, incensed at the growing corruption of his court, let the full weight of his wrath fall upon the poet, whom he regarded,

unfairly perhaps, as one of its main sources, but not unjustly as its most prominent mouthpiece. All appeals for mercy were rejected, and Ovid, though retaining his property and his position as a citizen, was compelled to take up his abode at Tomi. On his way there he wrote a book of eleven elegies deploring his fate, which he sent to Rome to awaken pity; this was followed by another, consisting of one long poem, written to palliate his offence in publishing immoral verse; and from the place of his exile three more books were sent, containing thirty-nine elegies similar to those in the first book. In these five books, bearing the fit name of *Tristia* (sorrows), Ovid appears as utterly unmanned by his fate. There is a wearisome monotony in the matter, though as yet there is no failure of the marvellous ingenuity which pours forth so many variations on the same theme, nor is there any marked diminution of the ease and grace of the versification. And although we are at times disgusted by the grovelling flattery of the Emperor, it is not to be forgotten how terrible a fate it was for one of Ovid's pleasure-loving sensitive temperament to be banished from the brilliant centre of culture and society to a desolate, unhealthy, and dangerous place on the very outskirts of civilisation.

As time went on he ventured to address himself more directly to his friends at Rome, and sent to them in succession four books of *Epistles from Pontus*. Not less than twenty of his friends are named in them, and it is evident that he is now losing the fear that loyalty to old attachments will prove dangerous, and even cherishing the hope that his place of exile may be changed for a more agreeable one, if his punishment is not remitted altogether. If he thought that his friends might do something for him, the hope was soon

abandoned when in 14 A.D. Augustus was succeeded by Tiberius, and three years later Ovid died at Tomi.[1]

Ovid is as completely representative of the later Augustan period as Vergil and Horace of the earlier and nobler part of the reign; and his main interest for us now lies in the manner in which he reflects the life of fashionable society. But his influence over later Latin poetry was great, though by no means wholly for good. Those who had no taste for the great and comprehensive conceptions of Vergil or the artistic self-restraint of Horace were fascinated by the brilliant fancy and lively narrative of Ovid; and as rhetoric took a larger place in education, the most rhetorical of poets was naturally high in favour. In the Middle Ages too, and even in the Elizabethan epoch, no Latin poet was more constantly read and admired. But the absence of any real depth of thought or earnestness of purpose precludes him from ranking high among the poets who teach or move us. He is a type of the gaiety, brightness, and versatility which we connect with the Italian genius, rather than of the manlier and more elevated qualities which are recalled by the name of Rome.

B.—AUGUSTAN PROSE

1. The prose of this period is represented to us by **Livy**, the most eloquent of historians. **Titus Livius** was born eleven (or, according to one ancient authority, thirteen) years after Vergil, at *Patavium*, the modern Padua, an important and prosperous town in Cisalpine Gaul. There he studied rhetoric

[1] The latest of his productions seems to have been an obscure poem called *Ibis*, in which he imprecates many curses on a friend who had proved unfaithful.

and philosophy, wrote philosophical dialogues, and practised as a teacher of rhetoric. But about the time of the battle of Actium he seems to have come to Rome; and there devoted himself mainly to his great historical work. This was to have contained 150 books, divided into fifteen decades, and narrating the history of Rome from its foundation to his own time; but as the brief epitome of it, which is preserved, ends with Book 142, describing the events of 9 B.C., the whole design was probably not completed when Livy died in 17 A.D. Of this great work less than one-fourth remains; we have Books i.-x., and Books xxi.-xlv., with a few gaps in the latter section; these cover the periods 753-293 B.C. and 218-167 B.C.; hence it is plain that the later portions of the history were treated with much more fulness than the earlier parts.

As a critical historian Livy leaves much to be desired. His good faith is undoubted; and he followed closely the best authorities known to him among the earlier annalists. But he had no sense of the importance of original research, and little knowledge of the growth of the constitution, or of legal antiquities. His descriptions of places are often loose and inaccurate, and he rarely visited even those which were within his reach; his chronology too is sometimes confused and inconsistent. Nor is he a philosophical historian. His reflections are not profound; he has no firm grasp of the causes and significance of events. But it is as an artist that he stands unrivalled. His style has been described by a great critic (Dr. Munro) as the finest prose ever written in any age or country, and it is largely his own creation. The earlier annalists had been bald and rude. Neither Caesar nor Sallust could serve him as a model. His period

is modelled on that of Cicero, of whom he was a warm admirer, but it has greater elasticity and variety. It is enriched, almost unduly, with poetic colouring, and with new constructions in which we may see the result of a study of Greek. His first decade was being written at the same time as the Aeneid; but even here, and still more in the third, the influence of Vergil is plain. His narrative is vivid and brilliant; the speeches which, according to the practice of ancient historians, he is fond of introducing, though historically worthless, are dramatically most effective; his rhetoric is skilful and telling, and brings out forcibly his conception of the leading characters. But what gives the greatest charm to his work is his warm sympathy, his moral earnestness, and his genuine patriotism. His attitude in relation to the early history of his country is much like that of Vergil; though we have no proof in what remains to us, that he welcomed as thankfully the rule of Augustus, he seems at least to have accepted it as a necessity; but his heart was wholly filled with a sense of the greatness of Rome, and his vivid imagination and literary skill leave this sense indelibly in the minds of his readers.

2. Two other prose-writers of the same period have far less interest for us. **L. Annaeus Seneca** of Corduba, in Spain, who taught rhetoric at Rome under Augustus and Tiberius, compiled in his later years a collection of extracts, showing the way in which distinguished rhetoricians of his time had treated themes set for practice in the schools. These were either disputed questions of equity (*controversiae*) or subjects for declamation (*suasoriae*), and Seneca's work proves the abundant ingenuity spent upon these exercises, and enables us to realise the methods of training in favour.

But it is not important as literature. Another large treatise by **Vitruvius Pollio** deals in ten books with architecture; it contains much valuable information, derived mainly from Greek authorities; but the style is of interest mainly as an example of the ordinary Latin of the time, written by one who had no literary culture. Other prose-writers of the time devoted themselves to antiquarian or grammatical studies, but they survive only in later abridgments.

PART III

THE DECLINE OF ROMAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE CLAUDIAN PERIOD

1. The literature of the time of Augustus had been directed, not to the nation at large, but in the first place to the cultivated circles of the capital. But when freedom was stifled here under the jealous rule of Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius, the result was at once the loss of all freshness and spirit. As men had little that they ventured to say, in order to attract any attention they had to say it in a strained and affected fashion. The influence of the schools of rhetoric was wholly in this direction; it could only have been counteracted by the sense that a writer of force and convic-

tion could find a hearing among the people at large, and appeal to broad popular sympathies. But this was just what was impossible. Hence under the early empire literature was almost silent, and when it finds a voice again, it shows in its tones the plainest signs of the pressure under which it had passed.

Under Tiberius we have in prose only the third-rate historian **Velleius Paterculus,** a warm and perhaps a sincere flatterer of the emperor; the anecdotist **Valerius Maximus,** popular in the Middle Ages, but of little value; and the important treatise on medicine by **Cornelius Celsus,** which formed a portion (the only part now extant) of a copious encyclopædia of practical science. In verse there is the obscure and tedious poem of **Manilius** on Astronomy; and the popular and well-written fables of **Phaedrus.**

2. A much more important figure appeared under Claudius in the philosopher **Seneca,** whose influence stamped itself deep on his own and following generations. He was the son of Seneca the rhetorician, and was born like him at Corduba (3 A.D.), but was early brought to Rome. Trained by his father in rhetoric, he won brilliant success as a pleader; he retired for a while and gave himself to philosophy under Gaius, but resumed practice at the bar under Claudius, combining with this the work of training young speakers for his own profession, and soon became famous. Banished by the emperor to Corsica (41 A.D.), he there wrote some of his philosophical works, enforcing and applying to life the precepts of a mild form of stoicism, and probably some of his tragedies; but after eight years he was recalled, and made tutor to the emperor's step-son Nero. The good government of the empire during the first five years of Nero's reign (54-59 A.D.) was largely due to

Seneca; but afterwards he lost his influence, and being accused of sharing in the conspiracy of Piso (65 A.D.) was forced to commit suicide.

Seneca has been called the Ovid of Latin prose; and widely as he differs from him in his moral tone there is no little resemblance in style. There is the same ready rhetoric and never-failing ingenuity; the same brilliancy and glitter of epigram; the same abundant wit, passing at times into a straining of the point. Both were constantly imitated, but imitated especially for their faults; and splendid as their talents were, their influence was in a misleading direction. For Seneca marks a clear and deliberate departure from the tradition of the classical literature. His sharp-cut bright little sentences were just adapted to win applause at recitations; but at the same time were not ill suited to his more serious purposes. For in spite of the weaknesses and inconsistencies in his own life, Seneca aimed at being a real teacher. His philosophy does at least attempt to deal with life as he found it, and the themes of his various dialogues and moral epistles are such as had a vital interest for his readers. His writings are thus saved from the danger of being mere declamation; he writes because he has something worth writing, not solely to display his ingenuity. Hence they may still be read not only with pleasure, but with profit; and few books in Latin prose have more passages worth remembering, not only for their form but for their substance. The most important of them are twelve books of philosophical "dialogues," or rather discourses on such subjects as anger, providence, the shortness of life, and the like; two books on clemency addressed to Nero, seven books on benefits, seven on investigations of nature, containing much very interesting

information as to the current notions upon natural science, and twenty books of moral letters, 124 in all, addressed to his friend Lucilius. There is much discursiveness, much repetition, but this is almost unavoidable in view of the conversational tone which he endeavours to maintain. In fact it is one of the charms of his style that it is more like brilliant talk than formal exposition.

3. No other important prose-writer belongs to this generation; but the influence of Seneca may be seen in the style of **Quintus Curtius,** a historian who compiled, probably in the reign of Nero, a history of Alexander the Great, of which the last eight books out of ten have come down to us. Curtius has little merit as a critical historian, but is a good specimen of the prose of his time, already showing traces of declining taste and misplaced rhetoric. A contemporary writer **Columella,** coming like Seneca from Spain, wrote a treatise in twelve books (one of them in verse, in imitation of Vergil) on agriculture, which is of more interest for its matter than its form, although the style is not bad.

To the same period we must probably assign the extant fragment of a unique work, the *Satires* of **Petronius.** This seems to have been in its complete form a thorough medley, in which verse was mingled with prose, literary criticism with loose stories, licentious adventures, and humorous pictures of life. Its interest for us now lies partly in the glimpses that it gives us of one aspect, and that for the most part a truly lamentable one, of Roman manners, and partly in the numerous words and constructions belonging to the popular Latin, so imperfectly known, but so important as the source of the modern Romance languages.

4. Of the poets of this period the most prominent figure is Seneca's nephew, **M. Annaeus Lucanus**, commonly called **Lucan.** He was also born in Spain, but was brought to Rome at an early age, and there he was trained by the most popular masters of rhetoric. He showed astonishing precocity, and attracted much notice by the readiness and power with which he declaimed both in Greek and in Latin. According to the story, he was at first a favourite with the young Nero, but excited his jealousy by gaining a prize for which the emperor himself was a competitor, and so was forbidden by him to publish or to recite in public. He continued to compose with marvellous fertility, and before he was twenty-seven he had composed ten books of a poem on the civil war between Caesar and Pompeius, entitled *Pharsalia*, even in its incomplete form about three-fourths of the length of the Aeneid, and as long as the whole of the works of Horace. But, like his uncle, he was entangled in the conspiracy of Piso, and was compelled to commit suicide in 65 A.D. Lucan's poem is a result of splendid powers, often misled by false models and unchecked by a disciplined taste. It abounds in misplaced learning, leading often to wearisome digressions. Repulsive topics are dwelt upon with a morbid love of the horrible; exaggeration is abundant and extravagant; forced antitheses abound, and declamation is plentiful in season and out of season. The labour of the file, which Vergil and Horace steadily practised, and the latter preached, is constantly felt to be lacking. But there are magnificent passages, not merely of rhetoric, but of true poetic imagination, and many isolated lines which have become familiar quotations from their terse force or happy daring. And there is a

genuine loftiness of thought which carries one over much that is open to criticism in the form of its expression. There is truth in Quintilian's judgment that Lucan is fiery, passionate, and brilliant, a better model for orators than poets. But there are signs that with longer life he might have written a really great poem: the Pharsalia is a great one only in parts. The question, however, will still remain whether there was any subject open to a poet of Lucan's time on which a great epic could have been written. It is possible that he might have found his true utterance in the drama, had he shaken off the influence of the rhetorical and stilted tragedies that pass under the name of his uncle. But after the Aeneid it was no longer possible to write the epic of the nation's growth; and how little the well-worn themes of Greek mythology were now able to inspire was only too plainly shown in the next generation. "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?"

5. The same training in rhetoric, and the same desire for striking phrases, resulting in the laboured and contorted expression of simple or commonplace thoughts, found kindred but unlike utterance in the Satires of **Aulus Persius.** Persius was born of noble Etruscan parentage in 34 B.C., five years before Lucan; he was trained at Rome under the same influences, but chose for his main pursuit, not pleading, but philosophy, which he studied under the guidance of Cornutus, one of the best of the Stoics of the time. He wrote six short satires, whereby, as Quintilian says, he earned himself much true glory; and then died at the age of twenty-eight. His defects lie upon the surface. He is one of the obscurest, because one of the most unnatural, of writers. Every phrase is strained. Even those which he borrowed from

Horace (and a hundred imitations have been detected in 600 lines) are distorted almost out of recognition. He has no real experience of life, and his points are often borrowed. Deeply as he is indebted to Horace, he is said to have followed Lucilius still more closely. He owes far more to books than to his own reflection. And yet he is not undeserving of the special favour shown to him by many later writers and scholars. His genuine earnestness makes him at times singularly impressive; he is a youthful preacher with the defects and with the charm of his qualities. His pictures are at times strikingly vivid; Mr. Conington compares him to Carlyle. Above all he leaves us, as a satirist so seldom does, with the impression of a gentle, loyal, truth-loving spirit. If he belonged to a narrow circle, it was at least the best of his time, that kindly and refined stoicism which was the flower of Pagan philosophy.

CHAPTER II

THE FLAVIAN PERIOD

1. AFTER the death of Nero we find a change coming over the tone of the capital, which was quickly reflected in literature. The frivolous glitter of Nero's court no longer either set the fashion or provoked a reaction; a soberer style came in, and books were written for the quiet student rather than for the audiences that thronged to recitations. The leading prose-writer of this generation was **Pliny the Elder,** a compiler of unflagging industry, though of little literary merit. His *Natural History* in thirty-seven books

is the only one of his works now extant, though he also wrote a lengthy history and minor treatises. This is a storehouse of facts and fictions, put together with credulous diligence, but preserving much invaluable information. Its style has no character of its own. Starting with an introduction of elaborate pomposity, he goes on with careless jerkiness, diversified at times, when he moralises, by an attempt to copy the brilliant sententiousness of Seneca. No one would read him but for his matter, and in literature he hardly claims a place. He perished at the age of fifty-six in the famous eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D.

2. We have an epic poem dating from the same reign in the *Argonautica* of **C. Valerius Flaccus.** He appears to have died young, and his poem is unfinished; but his faults are not those of immaturity. In his love for the picturesque and his effectiveness in descriptions he recalls to us Ovid; in his obscurity of mythological references and his fondness for strained emphasis he belongs entirely to his own time. His theme was not one which inspired him, and all his mechanical skill in diction and versification cannot save his poem from the charge of tedious dulness. The best that can be said of him is that he kept up the tradition of the Vergilian style, so far as his powers permitted it.

3. The repressive tyranny of Vespasian's son Domitian checked the free utterance of thought, and stifled for the time the higher forms of literature. But it is in his reign that we find the first strenuous attempt to arrest the decay of style, and to uphold, as against the misleading influence of Seneca, the standard of a purer taste. Among the teachers whom Vespasian encouraged and endowed the most famous and influential was **Quintilian.** Towards the close of his

life, when at last he found leisure from lecturing for writing, he drew up a treatise in twelve books on "The Training of an Orator" (*Institutio Oratoria*), which embodied his methods and his judgments. It may be regarded as a model of healthy and sober sense. The orator was for Quintilian, as for Cicero, a man well trained in every way to do good service to his country; and so, although he lays what to us would seem undue stress on the formal side of his art, he by no means ignores intellectual and moral discipline. He could not give the concern with great things which makes the true orator; the state of the times did not permit that: but he did much to turn the thoughts of his pupils back to the best models, and to set up sound rules of judgment. We have another specimen of the prose of this period in **Sextus Julius Frontinus,** who has left us a treatise on aqueducts, and another of more general interest on military devices, written in a clear business-like style.

4. To the reign of Domitian too belong two noteworthy epic poets. The elder, **C. Silius Italicus** (25-101 A.D.), spent the early part of a long life in politics, and his later years in a pursuit of poetry marked by more diligence than talent. He was a slavish imitator of the diction and metre of Vergil, and produced many thousands of verses, as dull as they were faultless. He has left seventeen books of *Punica*, in which a narrative drawn from Livy is diversified by all the traditional ornaments of the mythological epic. The *Punica* is a poem put together according to all the proper recipes of art, but utterly devoid of inspiration or purpose. It is the characteristic work of a well-schooled lifeless age. The younger, **P. Papinius Statius,** is a writer of far greater natural powers. He could not escape the doom of writing epics on themes for which he

cared as little as his readers. Hence his *Thebais* in twelve books and his unfinished *Achilleis* have no other merit than that of a string of brilliant little pictures, elaborately finished, with the thoughts so polished as to be almost epigrammatic, but with no unity of purpose or of conception. We learn that these poems were received with great enthusiasm when they were recited; and it is the ears of an audience rather than the judgment of a reader to which this poet's fertile fancy and artistic polish appeal. Nowadays much more pleasure is to be obtained from his miscellaneous poems in five books, entitled *Silvae*. These were produced with considerable rapidity during the last few years of his life on various occasions, and give us a pleasant notion of the poet's own kindliness and ready genius, and also much historical information. On the whole, Statius, if the most obscure, is also the most original and gifted of a wearisome class of writers; those who in a time of political torpidity write in the trammels of a traditional art on subjects prescribed to them by fashion.

5. Another side of the poetry written under Domitian is given in the epigrams of **Martial**. Nothing could have been better suited to the taste of the time than these admirably witty and perfectly polished poems, in which, without the slightest moral sense or seriousness of purpose, the whole social life of the age is mirrored with the greatest plainness. Martial's ingenuity is astonishing, but not less astonishing is his utter absence of reticence or self-respect. He was born in Spain about 40 A.D., and came to Rome to push his fortunes in 64 A.D.; for thirty-four years he lived there by his wits, as a client of noble houses, returning to Spain in 98 A.D., where he died some six years later. A life in which he "lived to please" of

course made him feel that he "must please to live"; and his epigrams were adapted to the taste of his patrons. Undoubtedly this brings into prominence the weakest and worst sides of his character; and he protests not unfairly against those who would judge of his life by his verses. A nobler man would not have put himself into a position where shameless flattery and importunity were the necessities of his life. But he seems to have been a loyal friend and a kindly master, and to have retired not unwillingly from the luxurious life of the capital to a simple home and the delights of the country. His fourteen books of epigrams were published at intervals between 80 A.D. and 101 A.D. They are often obscure to us now from our ignorance of the circumstances to which they refer or from the extreme compression, which gives them much of their point. But more often they are as clear as they are sharp cut. Martial was the creator of the *epigram* in the sense which the word now bears;—in Greek the notion of *sting* by no means necessarily attached to it;—and in his own line he has never been surpassed for fertility and wit. And his verses have the great merit that they deal, not with an imaginary past, but with the real life of his own day, even if they give us only the outside and less worthy aspect of it.

CHAPTER III

THE REIGNS OF TRAJAN AND HADRIAN

1. With the death of Domitian freedom of utterance was recovered, and the reigns of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian saw at least three great writers who have

left us, each in his own way, vivid pictures of the life of the empire. Two of them are powerful satirists, though the satire of the one assumes the guise of history, and the long repression under which they lived gave the greater concentration and force to their thoughts, when they were able to utter them. The third, a genial letter-writer and an accomplished gentleman, gives us a far brighter view of society, and one which we may be glad to believe is more true to the uncoloured facts.

2. **Cornelius Tacitus** was born early in the reign of Nero, or possibly even before his accession; his public career began under Vespasian, and he owed promotion both to Titus and to Domitian. In Nerva's short reign he attained to the consulship, and he probably survived Trajan, to see some years of the rule of Hadrian. The earliest work which is ascribed to him is a "Dialogue on Orators," which can hardly be much later than 80 A.D. The style is a marked imitation of that of Cicero, though not without traces in language and constructions that the book was written more than a century later. It is a very interesting discussion of the differences between the oratory of Cicero's time and that of contemporary speakers, and the causes of the decline. Aper appears as the champion of the new rhetoric of the school of Seneca; Messala praises that of a purer time, and satirises the education of his own day; while Maternus, though admitting the degeneracy, finds the reason for it in the less excited, and as he holds happier, conditions of public life, arguing that the older generation is to be applauded, but by no means envied. Both in the matter and in the style we may find traces of the influence of the teaching of Quintilian. Nearly twenty years passed before Tacitus

produced his next work, the charming life of his father-in-law Agricola. The style of this little book shows the influence of Cicero diminishing, and that of Sallust much more marked. It is a biographical "study," with the same sententious reflections, rhetorical speeches, and want of historical breadth as are found in Sallust's monographs. Like Sallust, too, Tacitus seems to regard this as the forerunner of a large historical work. Another preparatory study is found in his brief treatise on Germany, its geography, its customs, and its tribes. Many guesses have been made as to the purpose of this book; and it has often been supposed that Tacitus wrote it in order to satirise the Rome of his own day by contrasting the luxurious capital with a nation of primitive simplicity. But this motive is not prominent, even if traces of it may be detected. It is sufficient to regard it as a sketch, for which Tacitus had special opportunities of obtaining information, of a people who played an important part in the history which he was intending to write. It is of interest to us as giving us an early, and on the whole a trustworthy account of the manners and life of the ancestors of the English nation.

3. Tacitus began his more important work in history by drawing up an account of the twenty-seven years between the death of Nero and the death of Domitian. This went under the name of *Historiae*, and consisted of fourteen books, so that the history was narrated in great detail; but only four books and a portion of the fifth have come down to us. Tacitus appears to have used excellent sources, mainly the voluminous history of the elder Pliny for the extant part, and the work is of the highest value. His style is by this time formed, though not as yet so strongly individual as in his later

work; it is forcible, sometimes startling, but not often obscure, and he has definitely broken with the Ciceronian traditions. His political prejudices do not, in the part preserved to us, seriously bias his narrative; they only colour his reflections. The work was probably issued in parts, during the earlier years of the reign of Trajan. When the narrative had reached the death of Domitian, Tacitus started again from an earlier point, and in sixteen books narrated the history of the fifty-four years between the death of Augustus and the death of Nero. This work is commonly, though on no very good authority, called *Annales;* and is one of the greatest histories in Roman or in any literature. Unfortunately a large part of it is lost. One MS. contains Books i.-iv. (14-28 A.D.), with a small fragment of Book v., and Book vi. complete (31-37 A.D.) Another contains part of Book xi. (from 47 A.D.), and Books xii.-xvi., the last being incomplete, reaching to 66 A.D., and so leaving a gap of three years before the date at which the Histories begin. The portions lost narrated the reign of Gaius (Caligula), with the first six years of Claudius, and also the last three years of Nero. In this work the style of Tacitus reaches its perfection. Setting aside the general tendency of his time to poetical and especially Vergilian phrases, fully shared by Tacitus, its prominent features seem to be due partly to his own genius, partly to his position as the leading orator of an age when the first thing demanded of a public speaker was that he should be brilliant and striking. Hence his pregnant epigrammatic brevity, his constant pursuit of variety, his incisive and forcible rhetoric. No prose could lend itself better to recitation, where the tones and emphasis of the reader would help the comprehension of the audience. His

moral elevation gives still more weight to his language. His patriotism is as genuine as that of Livy, though the pensiveness of the earlier writer now appears rather as indignant scorn. As a historian Tacitus cannot be considered impartial. The story of the reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero is told throughout from a standpoint of bitter hostility. Not that Tacitus is often consciously unfair. But the colouring which he gives to his facts, and especially the suggestion of motives in which he often indulges, show the satirist rather than the historian. The emperors are to him mainly the enemies of the Senate, in which he fancied he could find what still remained of old Roman freedom and virtue. Their undoubted services to the cause of peace and good government throughout the civilised world are lightly touched; every instance of jealousy and caprice in dealing with the nobles of the capital is dwelt upon. Often the sources from which he drew his accounts are suspicious; and he shows but little critical faculty in testing them. The desire for effect leads him to paint his pictures of men and things in colours far too glaring and sharply contrasted to be true to nature. He lived in an age of satire; and the last thing that we expect from a satirist, saddened by his own experiences of life, is a fair and well-balanced judgment. But for vividness, for dramatic power, for stately strength and terseness few historians of any age can be set by the side of Tacitus.

4. If Tacitus is a satirist in the guise of a historian, his contemporary **Juvenal** (**Decimus Junius Juvenalis**) is the very ideal of a satirist pure and simple. There are great difficulties in determining precisely the dates of his birth and death; but he must have been born in the same decade as Tacitus,

and cannot have long survived him. It seems certain that he was trained to rhetoric, and practised long as a declaimer. Probably it was not till after middle life that he took to poetry, but the ease and finish of his verse prove how completely he mastered the methods of his art. Some of his earlier satires may have been written under Domitian, and even gained him a reputation among his friends; but they can hardly have been published until the brighter days of Nerva, while others clearly date from the time of Trajan, and the later ones were written under Hadrian.

His satire has nothing of the lighter touch of Horace; he tells us, and we may well believe, that indignation inspired his verses. He is deliberately a preacher, and his earnestness excludes all play of sportive humour. He is witty enough, and his pictures are often grotesque, with the swift rapid touches of a keen observer; but he never forgets his purpose of moral impressiveness. Often he overstrains the note, but a fault too common in his profession and in his age need not make us doubt the genuineness of his sentiment. It is less easy to defend the love of vivid realism which often passes into offensive coarseness. His style is poetic declamation at its best. It is impossible, even for Tacitus, to pack a sentence more full of meaning or to arrange his words more tellingly. In his earlier and better satires not a word is wasted. The thought is sometimes commonplace; it is perhaps impossible for a moralist to be otherwise; but the expression is fresh from its intensity. Juvenal seems to have seen only one side of life; he is at home amid the corruptions of a city where the struggle for wealth was keen, and pleasure the aim of most men; but of the better thought of the time he

gives us little conception. The much-needed offset to the history of Tacitus and the satire of Juvenal is given in the letters of the younger Pliny.

5. **Pliny** was the nephew and adopted son of the naturalist. When he was born, Nero had been eight years upon the throne; he was therefore some years younger than Tacitus, but was in manhood an intimate friend of his. He was carefully educated under his uncle's care, and attained great reputation as an orator, and so reached the highest offices in the state. He dabbled in various forms of literature, but what we have remaining is ten books of Epistles, and one elaborate speech, the *Panegyric* in honour of Trajan. The letters have not the special value of those of Cicero; for they have not the same range and variety of style, nor are they in any case a frank self-revelation to the closest of friends of the hopes and fears, purposes and feelings, recorded at the moment. They seem to have been all written with a view to publication; or at any rate they were carefully selected and issued by the author himself as specimens of elegant literature. But this hardly diminishes their value as historical pictures of the best side of society at Rome. There is little or no serious treatment of important questions in politics or philosophy; but abundance of graceful narrative and description, pleasant gossip and kindly humour. We move, as we read them, in an atmosphere of good taste, high breeding, and varied culture. Nowhere in Roman literature do we feel more in the company of *gentlemen*. The glimpses of the darker side of social life are few; and we learn how much the philosophy of Greece, for which Juvenal has nothing but a sneer, was doing to brighten and purify at least some of the nobler lives. There is much to be gathered from these letters as to

the country life of the wealthier classes, and their relations with the farmers on their estates, and the inhabitants of the Italian boroughs; while the book of letters which Pliny sent from his government of Bithynia to the Emperor Trajan is full of instruction as to the methods of Rome's rule of her provinces.

6. **C. Suetonius** was some twenty years younger than Pliny, and owed much to his patronage. He rose to be secretary to Hadrian, but afterwards fell into disgrace, and employed himself in the compilation of numerous learned works. All of these are now lost, except a few fragments and his lives of the twelve Caesars. The last are of some historical importance, as containing many biographical details, which illustrate and at times correct the narrative of Tacitus; but they are often uncritical, and show no breadth of view. The style is on the whole straightforward, but not free from the rhetorical and poetical colouring fashionable in his time.

A somewhat later contemporary was **Cornelius Fronto,** the tutor to Marcus Aurelius. He had a great reputation for eloquence in his own time; but his letters, which were only discovered early in the present century, show that his style was a clumsy and affected attempt to revive an archaic tone, without any real freshness or power of thought. The same tendency may be seen in **Aulus Gellius,** whose *Attic Nights* are a very pleasant medley of literary, grammatical, and antiquarian discussions, valuable for the numerous quotations they contain, and showing genuine interest in the great writers of the past, but with little independent merit.

With Gellius the list of the writers who are in any sense classical may be said to be closed. Much

literature was still produced; but that which was best was, for the most part, on wholly different lines; and in its merits and defects lies outside the limits of this little sketch of the literature of ancient Rome.

THE END

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